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Social Security:

- **The Phony Crisis**
  JACOB MORRIS
- **The Struggle to Save It**
  THE EDITORS

The Cultural Politics of F.O. Matthiessen

LEO MARX

Argentina: The Crisis of Ultramonetarism

MIGUEL TEUBAL

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CONTENTS VOLUME 34 NUMBER 9 FEBRUARY 1983

REVIEW OF THE MONTH:

I—Social Security: The Phony Crisis by Jacob Morris 1

II—The Struggle to Save Social Security by the Editors 13

ARGENTINA: THE CRISIS OF ULTRAMONETARISM by Miguel Teubal 18

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY IN LATIN AMERICA by William Bollinger 27

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF F. O. MATTHIESSEN by Leo Marx 34

BOOKS: Corporate Power at the Local Level by Roger Bybee 57

CORRESPONDENCE: The Need for Dialogue between Catholics and Leftists by Ted Snyder 63

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Harry Magdoff and his wife, Beatrice, celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary at a party on January 1, 1983. Guests wishing to show their appreciation were asked not to give presents but, if they cared to, to make contributions to the Monthly Review Foundation. Almost $4,000 were donated and will be used to help finance a particular project still to be determined by the Foundation board and to be announced in this space in due course. Additional donations from friends and admirers will be warmly

(*Continued on inside back cover*)

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SOCIAL SECURITY: THE PHONY CRISIS

BY JACOB MORRIS

In a recent speech, the head of the main government workers union in the United States accused the Reagan administration of "bleeding" the nation in order to finance defense spending and tax breaks for the rich. It is now clear that one cherished national social institution which is scheduled by the Reagan crowd for a major blood-letting is the Social Security System.

It is surely a symptom of the present government's financial and political desperation that this hallowed sector of our wobbly welfare state should come under a slashing attack from the Reagan crowd. For more than forty years the contributors and beneficiaries of the Social Security System (there are, at the present time, 116 million enrolled people eligible to contribute via payroll taxes and 36 million cash-benefit recipients) have had it drummed into their heads, for reasons of high policy which we shall explain later, that the benefits promised by the system are sacrosanct. Over and over, year after year, they have been assured that they are legally, equitably, and morally *entitled* to the benefits promised under the Social Security law without a means test of any kind. According to these assurances, the basis of the entitlement is that the principal benefits, the monthly cash benefits for age and disability retirees and their dependents, the monthly cash benefits for dependents of deceased workers, and the hospital benefit part of Medicare, are all of them required to be paid exclusively out of funds

Jacob Morris is a frequent contributor to MR.

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flowing in from payroll taxes and from the special Social Security earned income tax contributions of the self-employed. (The latter are very similar to payroll taxes and we shall, for convenience, include them in that category.)

The Social Security setup requires that the payroll taxes designed for the financial support of the system be adjusted from time to time so that the sum total of the money flowing in from these taxes will, *over the long term,* be large enough to cover the money flowing out to the system's beneficiaries. A pay-as-you-go, cash-in/cash-out system is contemplated with only small reserves which are intended to fluctuate up and down in exactly the same fashion as the social insurance systems of many other nations around the world. The Social Security payroll tax inflow is allocated to three different trust funds: the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund, the Disability Insurance Trust Fund, and the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund. The benefit outflow, of course, comes out of those same funds.

It is recognized that, as with any pay-as-you-go system, the payroll tax inflow and the cash benefit outflow cannot be exactly matched for each individual calendar year. If that happened the Trust Funds would always have zero balances. Some years the tax inflow will be larger, some years the benefits outflow will be larger. For this reason it is desirable to set the Social Security payroll-tax rates high enough so that in most years, hopefully years of economic prosperity, the tax inflow will exceed the benefit outflow by a small margin. These margins or differences between inflow and outflow are meant to be accumulated, invested, and to earn interest. In total these accumulated differences, or asset balances, serve as an informal economic or contingency reserve.

The trust fund asset balances, or reserves, that we have just described, are meant to be utilized or drawn down or paid out—all these words mean the same thing—during depressions or recessions when the individual years' benefit outflows would naturally exceed inflows because of the impact of unemployment and early retirement. For unemployment reduces the Social Security tax inflow, since the unemployed don't produce payroll taxes, while the early retirement of unemployed workers swells the cash benefit outflow.

In recent years a new and unexpected factor has come in

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to further disturb the year-by-year balance between tax inflow and benefit outflow. Consumer prices have been increasing faster than wages; real wages have been falling (most economists believe that this situation will last, at most, a few years). Now since Social Security monthly cash benefits are indexed to the CPI (Consumer Price Index of the U.S. Department of Labor), this means that benefit outflow is, for the time being, increasing more rapidly than the wages on which Social Security taxes are paid. Hence it also means that the benefit outflow is increasing more rapidly than the Social Security payroll-tax inflow and that the asset balances in the trust funds are going down. This trust fund asset decline is a problem of a very temporary character which, as we shall show later, is not difficult to handle. Rising and falling asset balances are a normal feature of any pay-as-you-go system. However they furnish many openings for the enemies of Social Security to exaggerate, distort, and misrepresent any temporary financial difficulties that the system experiences.

At this point we wish to explain more fully the logic of Social Security entitlements. The principle which is most often cited as the foundation of the Social Security System is that benefit payments must be narrowly confined and limited to the levels permitted by the yield of the various Social Security payroll taxes. This form of limitation is a purely American phenomenon, and American workers have been literally brainwashed to believe in this principle as if it were Gospel Truth. The fact is that practically every other national social-security system in the world provides money for benefits from general revenues of the government in addition to payroll tax income which is directly earmarked for the Social Security funds. The American principle of an exclusively payroll-tax entitlement is something quite artificial which was concocted by the conservative opponents of Social Security in the 1930s and which the Roosevelt administration had to accept in order to get the original Social Security Act of 1935 through the Congress.

What the conservatives feared most then, and what they fear most now, is the prospect of endless demands by workers for increases in benefits. For increases in social benefits are a two-edged sword in the hands of the working class. They not only cut into the current flow of profits but, by increasing the

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workers' feelings of security, they strengthen working-class capacity and resolve to fight for higher wages and social benefits in the future. This is a threat to the future flow of profits. To head off such dangerous demands, it seemed essential to the conservatives to be able to confront every worker demand for benefit improvement with the legal requirement of an equivalent payroll-tax increase. And every time such an equivalent has to be computed there are opportunities to skillfully inflate it by pessimistic forecasts of future economic and demographic trends bearing on the cost estimates.

The conservative ploy of the payroll-tax entitlement principle succeeded brilliantly. Most American workers have been taught to be as snobbishly proud of this payroll-tax-based entitlement as they would be of a private home built with their own hands or out of their own savings. Many preen themselves on this form of entitlement and tend to look down with a middle-class sort of contempt on their less fortunate brethren who may have to rely on benefits which are available only after a means-test form of qualification, which is the case with welfare, food-stamps, Medicaid, and rent subsidies.

But if the more than 150 million participants and beneficiaries of the American Social Security System believe that they are entitled to no more Social Security benefits than their payroll-tax contributions justify, they also passionately believe that they are entitled to no less. They have been taught to believe that they have been promised only what they are entitled to and that they are entitled to everything that they have been promised. Many an old-timer still remembers the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said: "We put those payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my Social Security program." The reader will note how the old political fox Roosevelt turned the restrictive principle of payroll-tax entitlement around and made it into a protective principle. He succeeded so well that now the reactionary politicians are indeed "hoist by their own petard."

In the light of this historical background, no less than the pressure of current needs, it is not surprising that millions of Americans, particularly the senior citizens, have been rudely

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shocked and badly upset by the evidence emanating from the mouths and actions of the Reagan crowd indicating that they plan to treat the Social Security entitlement programs as just another part of the overall social-welfare budget which they may justifiably slash. Many more of these senior Americans voted for Reagan than for Carter. And of these pro-Reagan voters many supported him because they believed his silly and malicious lies that all that is needed to straighten America out is a vigorous cutback on unjustified social expenditures being made via welfare, food-stamps, Medicaid, and other means-test programs. Now it is becoming painfully clear that Reagan needs new categories of victims to bleed and that Social Security participants and beneficiaries are scheduled to be included among them.

There are at least two questions that press for an answer. First, how does it come about that Reagan is ready to violate all his election campaign promises and undertake such a politically hazardous and potentially self-destructive project as an attack on the sacrosanct Social Security System? And, second, what sort of a pack of lies is the Reagan crowd concocting in order to convince the potential victims that the planned bloodletting is exclusively intended for their own good and welfare?

With respect to the first question, a glance at any federal government budget projection (it doesn't matter whether it's David Stockman's or the Congressional Budget Office's) will show that, barring a reversal of Reagan's tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporations, it's either the Social Security or the Pentagon share of the budget that's got to get the axe. And since for the Reagan crowd tax benefits for the wealthy and massive military superiority over the Soviet Union are the alpha and omega of economics and politics, they can see no way out except slashing Social Security and other entitlement programs (such as federal employees' pensions).

To get down a bit to specifics: in the fiscal 1983 budget there is a prospective deficit, even after the passage of the August 1982 tax-increase legislation, of $150 billion. Now, major expenditure programs for the elderly (Social Security, Medicare, and Federal Employee Pensions) total about $250 billion, while military expenditures and interest on the national debt together require about $320 billion. The rest of the expenditure budget for everything else combined totals up to less

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than $200 billion. Of this residual $200 billion, social-welfare programs subject to means tests absorb about $70 billion. This means that if every nickel of expenditure for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing subsidies were to be eliminated there would still be a deficit of some $80 billion, i.e., $150 billion deficit minus $70 billion savings if all means-test programs were eliminated. But since the means-test program had already been cut to the bone by Reagan in 1981 and 1982 and since interest on the national debt is climbing rapidly (because of Reagan tax-cut deficits and high interest rates) there is no way in the world to get the prospective budget deficit down below, say, $100 billion a year other than by cuts in either the military or the Social Security programs.

The Reagan crowd have of course decided that it will be Social Security that has got to be slashed. But to put it over without incurring a political disaster they have to sell the American people on two very big lies. The first big lie is the lie of a current Soviet military superiority designed by the wicked reds for the purpose of conquest of the capitalist world, i.e., the familiar "Russians Are Coming" baloney. The second big lie is that of the impending bankruptcy or insolvency of the Social Security System. The purpose of the first big lie is to get public support for Reagan's crazy, overblown, military budget. The purpose of the second big lie is to set the stage for the bleeding of the Social Security System so as to provide blood transfusions for the military budget. The rest of this article will be devoted to an exposure of the second big lie.

Insolvency Flim-Flam

If the second big lie can be put over, it will scare the beneficiaries of the Social Security System into accepting without political protest the necessity of cuts in monthly cash benefits in order to prevent a total collapse of the entire system and a total cutoff of all benefits. The pitch the liars make is: You must accept a minor 10 percent or 15 percent cut in cash benefits now in order to prevent a drastic 100 percent cut in benefits later. The effectiveness of the lie depends heavily on the illegitimate application of the notion of the bankruptcy of an ordinary commercial firm to the financial operations of a branch of our national government, which the Social Security System is.

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In an ordinary commercial bankruptcy there are two phases. In the first phase a firm gets into difficulty because gross income from sales begins to drop below the cost of labor, materials, and sales and financing operations, i.e., profits become negative. In this first phase the firm goes deeper into debt; it borrows more from banks; it starts slowing up on payments to its suppliers and on the delivery of withheld income and payroll taxes to the government; it also starts pressing its customers to speed up their payments to it. In the second phase the roof caves in and a sudden very big quantitative change for the worse occurs in the unfortunate firm's cash flow. The banks refuse new credits and demand repayment of old debt; suppliers refuse to ship materials except for cash; the government and other creditors suddenly press their claims vigorously; customers return shipments and slow down on payment of older bills. All of a sudden there is almost no incoming cash flow at all and the firm has to suspend *all* payments and declare itself bankrupt.

It is because this second phase of total collapse of cash flow can't possibly occur with a government operation like Social Security that the bankruptcy or insolvency scare about Social Security is so totally phony. About the worst that could happen with Social Security is that the payroll-tax inflow will fall 10 percent or 15 percent short of the cash benefit outflow *for a few years.*

As we explained earlier the Social Security System operates on a pay-as-you-go, cash-in/cash-out, basis. Payroll taxes are set at levels which, over the long term, are supposed to be adequate to cover cash-benefit payments. Any deficiency in payroll tax rates can be remedied by an increase in the tax rate (usually a very small increase like ¼ percent or ½ percent of wages) or by an increase in the maximum wage base ($32,400 in 1982) to which payroll taxes are applicable. Year-by-year equality between tax inflow and benefit outflow is not possible: as explained earlier, any year-by-year excess of payroll taxes over benefits goes to build up the asset balances in the Social Security trust funds while any deficiency draws down the trust funds. When a trust fund's assets are decreasing we know that annual cash-benefit outflow is exceeding annual payroll-tax inflow and vice versa.

Payroll-tax inflows are, as noted earlier, allocated to three

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trust funds (see table below). According to the projections of the Congressional Budget Office, as reported in the *New York Times* of June 6, 1982, the prospective asset balances have been estimated as shown in the table. Each asset balance, as we have indicated, represents the accumulation of the annual differences between tax inflow and benefit outflow since the system began to operate, with accrual of interest on invested balances.

Assets in Trust Funds in Billions of Dollars

End Year	*Old Age and Survivors Insurance*	*Disability Insurance*	*Hospital Insurance*	*Combined Funds*
1982	12.6	6.4	21.0	40.0
1983	2.8	6.2	22.1	31.1
1984	–16.6 (deficit)	14.9	21.1	19.4
1985	–33.5 "	30.2	18.4	15.1
1986	–50.5 "	50.8	15.7	16.0
1987	–69.1 "	75.1	10.0	16.0

All the hue and cry about insolvency stems exclusively from the estimated negative figures for the years 1984 to 1987 in the first column of the above table. It has no other basis whatsoever. Let's examine and interpret a few of those figures. The Old Age and Survivors Insurance Trust fund shows a positive balance of $2.8 billion at the end of 1983: it's in the black to that extent, it has that much money in the till. But at the end of 1984 there is the *negative* balance of $16.6 billion shown, indicating that the fund will then be in the red to that extent. What this means is that during 1984 it is estimated that benefit payments in the Old Age and Survivors category will exceed payroll-tax inflow by $19.4 billion. The latter figure equals the difference between 1984 cash-benefit outflow of $168.4 billion and payroll-tax inflow of $149 billion (none of the last three mentioned figures is shown in the above table). When we subtract the $19.4 billion excess outflow for 1984 from the $2.8 billion asset balance at the end of 1983 we get the $16.6 billion year-end deficit shown in the table for 1984.

How can this deficit be covered so that no Old Age or Survivor beneficiary will have his or her benefits cut down during 1984? The obvious suppliers of funds to cover this deficit are the other two trust funds. For in the aggregate, as can be seen from the fourth column, there is no deficiency at all when

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the trust funds are combined. The combined asset balance for the three funds never falls below $15 billion. The funds as a whole will never run out of the cash needed to pay benefits according to the Congressional Budget Office projection.

One obvious way to straighten out what is really a very minor difficulty, in spite of the big numbers involved, is to change the allocation of payroll-tax inflow among the three trust funds. As noted, the adequacy of the payroll taxes as a whole to cover benefit outflow is demonstrated by the fact that the combined asset balance in the fourth column of the above table is positive, in the black, for all years. So all you have to do to eliminate the great phony Social Security insolvency crisis is assign more of the payroll-tax inflow to the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Trust fund and less to the Disability Insurance and Hospital Insurance Trust funds.

The so-called insolvency crisis we have been discussing above is often referred to as the Social Security crisis of the 1980s. For the long-range projections made by the Social Security administration show that all the problems of the 1980s will disappear in the 1990s. The reason for that is that the birth-rate was very low during the Great Depression of the 1930s so that the number of workers retiring in the 1990s and in the early years of the next century will be low compared to the number of employed workers paying payroll taxes during those years. According to Robert Myers, former Social Security actuary and Reagan's choice for Deputy Social Security Commissioner: "The 1990s will be a beautiful period as far as financing the system goes." Well, if that is so, it suggests another method for remedying any deficiency in the payroll-tax inflow of the 1980s. The Social Security Administration could sell bonds, guaranteed by the federal government and maturing in the 1990s. The bonds would be secured by the excess payroll-tax revenues of the 1990s, and the proceeds of the bond sales would be used to fatten up the Social Security trust funds in the 1980s. Alternatively, the U.S. government could make a temporary unsecured loan to the Social Security System as it did to New York City, Lockheed, and Chrysler.

We have by now suggested three methods of eliminating the great (phony) insolvency crisis of the 1980s without even raising the obvious possibility of a direct grant from the gen-

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eral revenues of the federal government. These methods are: (1) a small increase in payroll-tax rates or an increase in the maximum taxable wage base, (2) a re-allocation of payroll-tax revenue among the three trust funds so as to eliminate the deficit in the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Trust fund, and (3) a borrowing of the excess payroll-tax revenues of the 1990s for use in the 1980s. There are a great many other things that could be done to ease the financing problems of Social Security. One is a reform in the financing and administration of the Medicare and Medicaid Health Care systems. These systems are virtually licenses to steal for the greedy and socially irresponsible doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes of the United States.

Disaster in the Twenty-first Century

There is another type of misrepresentation of the Social Security System which is employed by its enemies and those of social-welfare programs in general. The object here is to convince young people that in the long run, say fifty years down the road, the whole Social Security System is bound to collapse. Even if insolvency is avoided in the 1980s, so that the present generation of senior citizens continue to get their benefits, the prediction is that many of their children, and certainly most of their grandchildren, are going to be cheated out of their benefits when retirement age rolls around for these younger people. The purpose of these scare tactics is to weaken the credibility of the system and soften up its defenders so that opposition to current benefit cuts will be undermined, and to set the stage for abolishing the Social Security System altogether.

As we have already suggested, the finances of the Social Security System will be in good shape from around 1990 to around 2010 because the birth rate was low between 1925 and 1945. For every retired worker on the Social Security benefit rolls between 1990 and 2010 there will be three or more workers contributing payroll taxes and the ratio of the inflow to benefit outflow will produce excesses of taxes over benefits which will fatten up the Social Security trust funds. But after the year 2010 the people born in the great baby boom of the post-Second World War period, starting in 1945, will be reaching age 65, and they will be retiring and receiving Social Security benefits.

About the best analysis we have seen of the emerging prob-

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lem just referred to is contained in Frank Ackerman's book *Reaganomics* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), and we can hardly do better than quote extensively from his analysis. Starting around the year 2010

> the ratio of people receiving benefits to people paying taxes into the trust funds will start to soar (unless there is another baby boom in the next decade, producing a surge of new workers by around 2010). By 2030 or so, almost all projections show Social Security, under its present system of financing, in serious trouble. Beyond that, presumably, either astronomical tax rates or lower benefits will be forced on us, if no major changes have been made in the system.
>
> Are lower benefits inevitable? How much security can we afford for the senior citizens of the year 2030? Whatever financing system is used, it is clear that retired people are ultimately fed and clothed by the labor of those who are currently working. But retired people are not the only ones in that position. Children are dependent on current workers in exactly the same way.

Ackerman then cites studies of the cost of maintaining young and old dependents and concludes that it is reasonable to consider dependents of all ages as placing roughly equal burdens on the working population. This leads immediately to the fundamental question: How many dependents per worker can we afford? Will the burden of dependents on the working population really be so excessive in the year 2030?

Ackerman then shows that standard Census Bureau projections of population combined with other very reasonable assumptions, indicate that there will be *fewer* dependents per worker in the next century than there were between 1950 and 1970. Here are some figures from Ackerman's table.

Year	*Number of Dependents per Worker*
1950	1.51
1970	1.51
2000	1.20
2025	1.33
2050	1.33

Ackerman comments on these figures as follows:

> Projecting the population decades into the future is an iffy business, of course. Nonetheless, the Census Bureau's best available guesses imply that the anticipated crisis in Social Security 30-50

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years from now does not reflect any overall increase in the burden of dependents on the working population. If we could afford to live through the childhood of the baby boom generation, we can afford to live through its retirement.

It is clear from this analysis that the problem which will have to be faced in the twenty-first century is the problem of a change in the mix of the dependent population. There will be fewer children and more oldsters. But the overall burden on the working population will not be increased, it will be decreased. Of course ways and means will have to be worked out to smoothly transfer resources which once went to the support of children into the support of the Social Security System. This will undoubtedly involve some application of general government revenue for the support of Social Security, just as in other countries.

Summing Up

The main purpose of the Reagan Social Security crisis-mongers (and their all too many Democratic Party helpers) in grossly exaggerating the "crisis" of the 1980s is to demoralize our retired workers and soften them up, politically, for an immediate cut in cash benefits. The obvious reason that the Reagan crowd can get so much Democratic Party help here is that many of the Democratic politicians are as bad as the Reagan hard-liners when it comes to whipping up hysterical overestimates of Soviet military strength in order to support an insane program of U.S. military and armament expansion, especially in the nuclear field. The Democratic Party hard-liners, too, see no way of feeding the Pentagon the megamillions it demands without deep slashes in Social Security.

The main purpose of the gross exaggeration of the Social Security crisis of the twenty-first century is to demoralize the active workers who pay the current taxes which provide the current benefits for the retired workers, who are their parents and grandparents. The crisis-mongers want to drive a wedge between the generations; they want to weaken the political opposition of the younger workers to the current attack on the benefits of their parents and grandparents. But beyond that the enemies of Social Security want to soften up the many millions of younger workers for a dismantling of the whole system and

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for its partial replacement by individual insurance and private company pensions.

Thus we may conclude that beyond the immediate goal of providing more current cash for the Pentagon there looms a more important long-term goal which is beckoning the enemies of Social Security. To the latter the system is a debilitating force which is aggravating the weakness of profit and capital accumulation in the United States. They are mobilizing for war on the Social Security System and on the working class it was designed to protect. They seem determined to prove to the world that Marx's General Law of Capitalist Accumulation is alive and well in America and that our capitalist system demands for its survival a new impoverishment of American workers.

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE SOCIAL SECURITY

BY THE EDITORS

Jacob Morris has effectively exposed the attack on Social Security for what it is, and he has done this *within the framework of the existing system*. The underlying assumption is that Social Security must be paid for out of an accounting reserve supported by payroll taxes. Based on this premise, generally accepted by liberals and conservatives alike, the financial integrity of the reserve is taken as equivalent to the integrity of Social Security itself. But the real questions are different. Why use an accounting reserve and why apply the test of financial integrity? No such tests are applied to any other part of the federal budget,

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surely not to the enormous armaments expenditures. Basically, what is at issue here is not a financial but a social problem. This was spelled out in a recent communication we received from Irving Kaplan, an economist friend of ours who has been a student of the Social Security program from its very inception:

> The most important political issues over the social-security program and its future are reduced, in the public mind and sometimes designedly, to technical issues often so abstruse and complicated that only experts can understand either the issues or the merits of the proposals to modify benefits, thus providing a field day for all manner of political claims and confusion.
>
> In reality, however, all the fuss and feathers over the problem of social-security financing and the future of the social-security system reduces to the very simple question faced by the American people and their government in 1935, faced very directly too when the country first began to raise its head out of more than five dismal years of unprecedented depression: Should and will the government accept the responsibility for assuring (for all time, as everybody then thought) that the working people of the country and their families shall have a decent standard of living during their working lifetime and in their old age when they are ready for and have earned their right to retirement?
>
> The question of responsibility of society as a whole, of an acceptable social order, for assuring a life in decency for the people who built or build the country and provide—as only they can and must—the means for everyone's livelihood, i.e., the standard of living for the whole country, had already confronted 100 million Americans, more or less, for years and been the subject of discussion in millions of homes, in workplaces, wherever people met. By 1935, when the government did accept this responsibility, enacting the Social Security Act of 1935, it was clear beyond any doubt, even the doubts of those who had stalled and delayed on the issue before, that the people's answer was an emphatic Yes!
>
> The question really being raised by the proponents of cutbacks now is whether the country can afford to fulfill the responsibility acknowledged in 1935. To the implicit question they give only an implicit answer, a presumptive No. The only effective response is to re-frame the question: Can the country afford to *renounce* the commitment made to its working people in 1935? And to answer it with a resounding No! Only the working class can give this answer with the necessary political resonance.

The proposition that the United States cannot afford the presently constituted, or an improved, Social Security program is as phony as the talk about its possible bankruptcy. Jacob

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Morris has clearly shown that even within the context of an accounting reserve the issue of financial bankruptcy is only a propaganda ploy. In any event, the pension obligations could and should be paid out of the general revenue instead of from funds raised through the regressive payroll tax. All that is at stake is the political will to do so—by cutting military expenditures, eliminating tax loopholes, and raising tax rates for the wealthy. Nor should anyone doubt the basic ability of the economy to supply the needed goods and services which the pensions would buy, in light of the existing idle productive capacity, the great capability to enlarge productive capacity, an ever-present surplus of unemployed labor, and a huge agricultural production.

Yet despite these fundamentals the propaganda mills of the bourgeoisie grind on. The latest blockbuster consists of two long articles in the *New York Review of Books* by Peter G. Peterson, chairman of the board of the investment banking firm Lehman Brothers Kuhn Loeb and a former Secretary of Commerce. ("Social Security: The Coming Crash," December 2, 1982; and "The Salvation of Social Security," December 16, 1982) These articles appearing in a journal with prestige among many intellectuals got quick results. The liberal *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis promptly jumped on the bandwagon, digesting and endorsing Peterson's attack on Social Security benefits for a much wider public. (The column by Lewis, "The Social Security Alarm," appeared in the *Times* of November 29, based apparently in part on advance copies of the *New York Review of Books* articles.)

The Peterson articles contain a mountain of fallacies and bogus arguments. This is not the place for a full-dress refutation, but we must draw attention to what amounts to the heart of his analysis:

> Nothing could be more salutary for the prospect of long-term productive investment and indeed the global financial system than the news that these grotesquely large obligations to pay public retirement benefits were being reduced and brought under control.
>
> Investment requires savings. One reason we are investing too little is that we are using up every year, in current and often imaginative consumption, far too much of the income we are producing.

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This is said at a time when manufacturing firms are operating at less than 70 percent of capacity, when vast sums in the hands of corporations and the wealthy are devoted to mergers and all sorts of speculation, while welfare benefits are being steadily reduced and the unemployed go hungry. In the midst of such widespread failure of the capitalist system, all that the chairman of one of our leading investment banks has to offer as a solution is a further reduction in consumption, especially by the aged. For what? So that the investment bankers can have still more funds available with which to profit from financial manipulations? (See the Review of the Month on "Supply-Side Economics," March 1981 MR, for a discussion of the fallacy of the lack of savings being the cause of inadequate investment.)

It would be hard to match the hypocrisy underlying the claim that the health of the global financial system would be improved by a reduction of the "grotesquely large obligations to pay public retirement benefits." What exists today is an international financial system that has been brought to the brink of collapse by the ruthless, uncontrolled drive for profits by the bankers and by the burgeoning Eurodollar market that has arisen as a result of arrogant U.S. imperialist policies. The way to rescue the system, this banker has the gall to tell us, is to reduce further the consumption of the masses and, in particular, to renege on the country's longstanding commitment to the aged. Could there be a clearer demonstration that the attack on Social Security is a class issue? As ever, the ruling class is seeking to preserve and increase its wealth by shifting the burden of the crisis on to the backs of the workers, including the retired. The fightback can only be effectively conducted if there is proper awareness by the people that the struggle over the future of Social Security is a class struggle—that the real issue is not finance but social justice.

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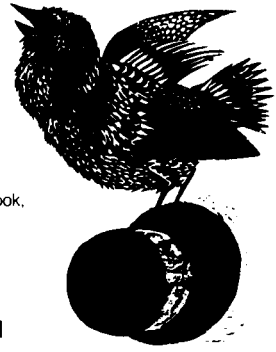

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ARGENTINA: THE CRISIS OF ULTRAMONETARISM

BY MIGUEL TEUBAL

On the eve of the Malvinas conflict, Argentina was immersed in one of the major economic crises of the country's history. Massive closures of factories, a growing paralysis of economic activity, sharp rises in unemployment, a virtual collapse of the financial system, the enormous magnitude of domestic and foreign debt, and the persistence of one of the highest rates of inflation in the world, were only some of the more critical indicators of a true debacle.

In 1981 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 6.1 percent (and the decline continued at about the same rate in 1982), resulting in a per capita income lower than ten years ago; industrial output and investment suffered severe reductions, falling 16 and 21 percent respectively. At the same time unemployment was increasing dramatically: trade-union sources estimate the number of unemployed at 1.5 million late in 1981, or 20 to 25 percent of the labor force. Government sources report lower rates of unemployment—about 15 percent of the labor force—but still much higher than in previous years. This situation worsened in the early months of 1982.

The case of Argentina can be considered to be one of deliberate "deindustrialization" and "underdevelopment" in the Third World: not only did industrial output fall—at least 18.8 percent between 1974 and 1981—but income distribution be-

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came much more unequal and regressive. The generalized crisis developing in 1981, which became acute in recent months because of the Malvinas tragedy, is the ultimate outcome of a process which began in March 1976 when the armed forces once again took over.

The financial crash of 1980 and the magnitudes attained by domestic and foreign debt are additional indicators of the present crisis. Already in 1980 business indebtedness had reached very high levels. Bankruptcies in the 1976-1980 period, calculated in real values, doubled compared to the previous five-year period. Furthermore, it is estimated that at present Argentina's foreign debt exceeds $34 billion, five or six times more than in 1976. Part of this foreign debt ($18 billion) is payable at relatively short term, which in 1982 will imply the need for $7 billion in immediate rollovers.*

As if this were not enough, since 1979 Argentina once again began having balance-of-payments difficulties, reversing a trend sustained in the first three years of military government. While exports increased from about $4 billion in 1976 to more than $8 billion in 1980, due to increases in the volume and prices of Argentina's traditional beef and cereal exports (reflecting in part the fact that the USSR became Argentina's main customer and paid high prices for her cereal products), imports increased proportionately more, from about $3 billion in 1974 to $10.5 in 1980. Thus, after a brief period of surpluses, Argentina's balance-of-payments difficulties once again emerged. A $4.8 billion deficit was incurred in 1980, reaching about $3 billion in 1981. Much of this was due to the increased service and interest charges of the growing foreign debt.

Finally, Argentina has one of the highest rates of inflation

* Most of the data presented in this paper come from official sources and were published in the press or specialized publications. Much information is also provided in several articles published in Spanish: A. Ferrer, "La economía argentina, 1976-1979," *Economía de América Latina* (México), no. 5, 1980; A. Canitrot, "Teoría y práctica del liberalismo. Política antiinflacionaria y apertura económica en la Argentina, 1976-1981," *Desarrollo Económico,* no. 82, June-Sept. 1981; R. Frenkel, "La apertura financiera externa: el caso argentino," *Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad* (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1981; J. M. Candia, "Argentina: Cambios en el mercado de trabajo en el período 1976-1981 y perspectivas," mimeo, 1982.

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in the world. Inflation hardly ever fell below 100 percent per annum throughout these years, and in 1981 reached 131 percent. As we point out later on, the so-called anti-inflationary program of the military junta was, paradoxically, responsible for maintaining inflation at such an intense rate.

II

To my mind, the present economic crisis of Argentina is the direct outcome of the application of ultramonetarist economic policies by the military junta, and these were part and parcel of its overall political program. It cannot be simply explained by temporary or accidental factors, or by the incorrect application of this or that instrument of economic policy. Rather, the present crisis must be visualized as a result of the socio-economic and political program implemented by the military junta since 1976 and as inherent in its drastic regressive income redistribution and financial and economic liberalization policies.

Apart from the military's declared intention, when it took over in 1976, to fight "subversion" without the constitutional restrictions set by the rule of law and to "eliminate the disorder and corruption caused by the previous Peronista government," as well as the "excesses of trade union activity," the military also pointed out the need, as one of its long-run objectives, to produce a "structural transformation" of Argentine society. This implied changing some of the basic traits of the country's social and economic structure, dampening much of the vitality that the social forces comprising Argentine civil society have shown historically, developing a new hierarchical order in society, and making much more difficult or impossible the repetition of popular or nationalistic governments such as that of Peronism.

According to this perspective, the basic culprit causing the rise of "populist" regimes in Argentina was the type of industrialization developed in the past 50 years or so. In effect, for the ideologues of the military junta, import-substitution industrialization such as that promoted in Argentina since the 1930s, developed in limited and protected markets and based on subsidies of all sorts, cheap credit, and protectionism, generated industries which were inevitably "inefficient" and incapable of

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competing on world markets. Thus it was deemed crucial that the economy be "opened" to international competition, that tariffs be lowered systematically, and that the banking and financial system be reformed and integrated with world finance so that local industry would have no more access to "cheap borrowing" for its expansion. This economic program also required a "liberalization" of the pricing system to enable the market to function effectively, as well as a reduction of "government intervention" to a minimum. Only then, according to the succeeding economic ministers of the military junta, would it be possible to achieve a more efficient allocation of resources and consequently an "adequate" distribution of incomes. Finally, inflation was to be controlled by way of reducing government deficits.

This program implied, in the words of one observer, that "industrialization as an objective of economic policy should be set aside" and that the working and salaried classes would have to accept reductions in their real incomes and in their future aspirations. It also implied that the country should sell out completely to transnational corporations, eliminating the type of industrial development attained in the past.

In recent years, probably as a consequence of the polarization of forces created by the world capitalist crisis, monetarist programs of this sort have been implemented in many countries. With variations they have been applied in Thatcher's Great Britain and in Reagan's United States. But their application in the Third World, in particular in the Southern Cone countries of South America, has been widespread and more extreme. The policy applied in recent years in Argentina was probably the most extreme of all monetarist brands, in particular because of its open-door financial feature.

From the very beginning a wholly repressive political and institutional setting was required for the application of ultramonetarism in Argentina. It is in fact difficult to conceive its implementation without the persistence of a full-fledged authoritarian regime, creating a climate of terror as a basic feature of everyday life. Thus, trade unions and political parties were intervened, suspected activists were persecuted, jailed, killed, or simply disappeared, cultural life was stamped out, and even being young became suspect. In essence, state terrorism became inseparable from ultramonetarism.

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Traditionally, social forces in Argentina have shown great vitality as a consequence of the particular class and economic structure and the political movements which have characterized Argentine society. Thus, the Argentine working classes have a long tradition of struggle and organization. Argentina is a country with large urban and rural middle sectors, where medium and small businesses have frequently been organized even in opposition to the traditional establishment. All these sectors of civil society have frequently been vocal and active through their organizations. Furthermore, the ruling establishment in Argentina has never managed in recent years to create a conservative party of its own capable of winning elections. Within the context of liberal democratic processes it has repeatedly felt menaced by civil society and consequently has been prompt in promoting military coups and regimes willing to carry out its political and economic programs.

In the past two decades several monetarist experiments have been tried in Argentina. The most characteristic have been those associated with the names of the economic ministers that carried these programs out: Alsogaray in 1961, Krieger Vasena in the 1967-1970 period, and Martínez de Hoz under the recent military regimes (1976-1981). The monetarist programs of all these economic ministers required a repressive setting for their implementation. The so-called *Plan Conintes,* which suspended constitutional rights in the last phase of the Frondizi presidency (1958-1962), was essential for Alsogaray's "Stabilization Plan" in 1961. The so-called *Revolución Argentina,* an outcome of the military coup of 1966, was necessary for Krieger Vasena's plan. And finally, the present "Process of National Reconstruction," which contains as one of its essential ingredients the "Doctrine of National Security," is an essential part of the programs applied by Martínez de Hoz and his successors.

For the reasons mentioned above it is doubtful that any of these monetarist programs would have been applied in a relatively democratic institutional setting in which political and trade-union activity are permitted and the rule of law and free elections are respected. It is also worth noting that in 1974-75 Gómez Morales and C. Rodríguez, the economic ministers of Isabel Perón, in the last phase of the recent Peronista government, also tried applying ultramonetarist economic policies.

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These also required an increase of repressive measures so that, among other factors, the real income of wage earners could be reduced. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice the strong opposition this program elicited from within the Peronista government itself, in particular from trade unions which supported that government. Here too ultramonetarism led to the rampant chaos which preceded the military coup of 1976.

Despite their particular features all these monetarist economic programs had many things in common: all were intent on increasing the exploitation and oppression of the working classes, lowering real wages and the share of wage income in national product; all developed open-door policies vis-à-vis the world market; all proposed special facilities to foreign capital; all spoke of reducing "state intervention," visualized as the main cause of inflation and inefficiencies; and all provided for a "free market" by liberalizing price policies and periodically readjusting public utility rates. Nevertheless all these programs resulted in severe economic and political crises.

The economic policies of the present military regime have been much more extreme and ultramonetarist than those of its predecessors. Their regressive income-redistribution consequences have been much greater as well as their depressive effects on the economy. The present crisis can be seen as being symptomatic of the failure not only of the economic, but also the political, program of the military junta.

III

It was not long before the critical economic situation in Argentina began having social and political consequences. The military regime became increasingly isolated and was repudiated by a growing opposition coming from all walks of life. Even important segments of the business community and agricultural interests, which previously had wholeheartedly supported the military, began to criticize the military's economic program. In early 1982 there was much talk of a possible popular uprising, given the fact that the living conditions of the working classes had become unsustainable. Political and trade-union activity, despite continuing government prohibitions, began picking up. Pressure for a democratization of society and the call for elections became common everyday currency.

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It was in this context that the armed forces, without previous consultations of any sort, occupied the Malvinas Islands. They thought that in this way they could play upon the nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments of the population, stifling legitimate popular discontent, and creating a climate of "national unity" behind the war effort. With this act the military junta reacted to a generalized and growing opposition which was making its continued political rule unbearable. Thus the attempt to recapture control over the Malvinas Islands can be seen as an act of desperation, aimed at prolonging the military's rule as well as opening the way for an eventual "honorable" withdrawal to the barracks, a reversion to the military's traditional role as the "praetorian guards" of the political process.

But the Malvinas affair turned into a tragedy which has boomeranged dramatically. The military defeat at the hands of the British led the way to a much more severe and profound crisis extending into the midst of the military. Once defeat was recognized, when the corruption involved in the Malvinas operation began to be known, when knowledge of how soldiers died of hunger and cold only 500 yards away from Port Stanley because supplies never reached them, when the poor performance of their officers became known in a war for which it had been assumed they had been trained as professionals, then the crisis began acquiring a tremendous political significance.

The unity of the armed forces was torn asunder. Galtieri was forced to resign for his share of responsibility in the military adventure, and a new president was installed. The only way out for the military was to lift restrictions on political activity and call for elections in 1984. It is evident that the regime is on the way out; the only problem is how it is to retreat without having to explain—especially to explain what had happened to the 16,000 people who were kidnapped and had "disappeared." Why is there so much hunger and misery brought about by ultramonetarist policies? Why has corruption become so rampant? And what happened in the Malvinas war in which soldiers were sent to die or be mutilated for no reason whatsoever?

The military sees no way out but to pass on the burden to the political parties and to a government emerging from elections. To accomplish this, it is counting on the help of the more moderate politicians of the two main political forces, the Peron-

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ist and Radical parties. There is also talk at present that elections may be advanced before the parties are reorganized and the full-fledged participation of the rank and file is permitted. It is evident that the military and the political establishment as well are counting on the more moderate politicians of the traditional parties to help in this transition.

But events in Argentina cannot easily be foreseen. Popular participation is on the increase, new forms of organization at the grass roots are emerging, and nobody knows how the four million new electors will vote in the next elections. The military and the establishment may not be able to control the situation despite the fact that at present they have no other choice but to try. A repetition of the 1973 situation, when Cámpora was elected president, is something the military is trying to avoid at all costs. On the other hand, new military coups would only lead to a "Bolivianization" of the political process and would tend to divide the armed forces even more. Still, this alternative should not be ruled out, especially if the military feels threatened by the advance of the working classes. After all, the repressive apparatus apparently remains to a large extent intact.*

Everything points toward the development of a complex and turbulent political process. Whatever the short-run outcome, there is an important political opening going on and the prospects for greater popular participation are on the upswing. The hope is that this will constitute a guarantee for a full-fledged democratization of society. In essence, the political climate is changing substantially after the long night of military rule.

* The Malvinas war is bound to have a tremendous ideological impact. The military regime—despite good commercial relations with the USSR—considered itself one of the bulwarks of "Western civilization" and was even intent on supporting the United States in Central America against the "communist threat." Nevertheless, it was none other than Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the "natural" allies of the military junta, who not only betrayed them but even waged war against Argentina. On the other hand, Cuba, Nicaragua, the non-aligned countries, and most of Latin America emerged as their main supporters. Thus arguments that the military can save Argentina from "communism" may have lost much currency.

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REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY IN LATIN AMERICA

BY WILLIAM BOLLINGER

The Central American revolutions, like the Cuban Revolution a generation earlier, are beginning to have an impact on the strategic thinking of leftist parties throughout the hemisphere and beyond. The Soviet Union and its fraternal parties in Latin America, generally committed to an electoral path to power in coalition with social democrats and other reformist bourgeois forces, were very much taken by surprise when the *Sandinistas* triumphed over Somoza in 1979—as they had also been surprised by the fall of Batista 20 years before. Because the pro-Moscow parties in El Salvador and Guatemala are now integral and active participants in the respective revolutionary fronts of their countries, the Central American revolutions portend a quite direct and possibly profound impact on the conventional Communist parties of Latin America. Indeed, there is already evidence of the impact from Mexico to Chile.

In this context of incipient critical reassessment of questions of revolutionary strategy in Latin America, the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS) published a political statement in early 1982 which has far-reaching implications for the international communist movement. Entitled "Power, the Character

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and Path of the Revolution and the Unity of the Left,"* by party General Secretary Schafik Jorge Handal in December 1981, the article constitutes a fundamental critique of the reformist general line of most Latin American Communist parties today in the context of a specific self-criticism of the PCS's own record prior to April 1979.

Handal had been quoted previously as recognizing that the PCS had taken up armed struggle in El Salvador "a bit late," and implying that the party had placed too much faith in the potential bourgeois leadership of the country's democratic and anti-imperialist movement.** In "Power" he not only elaborates and deepens this criticism of his own party but boldly questions key aspects of the theoretical framework and political strategy of the fraternal parties throughout the continent, making specific references to Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile, Uruguay, and Peru.

Historical Context

It was the Cuban Revolution, of course, as well as the China-Soviet polemics, which sparked widespread ferment in the Latin American CPs during the 1960s. The Communist movement became severely divided in most countries. The "new left" in Latin America consisted primarily of Guevara/*foco* and Maoist tendencies, neither of which proved capable of guiding the revolution. As these currents fell into disarray, most conventional CPs remained consolidated around a conception of peaceful, reformist, and electoral transition to the revolutionary process. By the early 1970s the Cuban party also became reunited somewhat with this perspective. Cuba endorsed the 1975 Havana declaration of Latin American CPs which, in the wake of the tragic defeat in Chile, held up the military-led reform process in Peru as typifying the strategic path of the Latin American revolution.

The Salvadoran party, while tending to embrace the reformist strategy, has a very particular heritage. It will be re-

* The article was published in issue no. 4 of the PCS's theoretical journal, *Fundamentos y Perspectivas* (January 1982), and an English translation is being circulated in the United States as a separate pamphlet. I have made certain corrections in the translation of some excerpts quoted here. The English version is available by sending $2 to Librería Latinoamericana, 1860 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033.

** See *Granma,* June 1 and 8, 1980; and *Intercontinental Press,* July 28, 1980.

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called that in 1932 the PCS helped organize and lead one of the most important mass insurrections in the history of Latin America. The lessons of that experience were still being digested by Salvadoran Communists when the Cuban victory in 1959 put the question of armed struggle back on the revolutionary agenda in Latin America. Furthermore, the tenacious opposition to reform by the coffee-planter wing of the Salvadoran bourgeoisie served as a partial objective check on reformist illusions within the party. For several years in the early 1960s, following the overthrow of a reformist junta upon which the party had pinned its hopes, the PCS prepared for armed struggle through the *Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria* (FUAR), in which Handal himself was a key leader. A number of the principal leaders of the other four vanguard organizations in El Salvador today played important roles in the PCS, including Salvador Cayetano Carpio of the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación* (FPL), Fabio Castillo of the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC), and the late Roque Dalton of the *Resistencia Nacional* (RN). Carpio had preceded Handal as PCS general secretary and had waged a long struggle within the party against reformist tendencies.

But from the late 1960s until 1977 the PCS became more firmly consolidated around a reformist strategy stressing the need to win elections in alliance with social democrats and the Christian Democratic Party. This led the party in 1969 to adopt a much criticized nationalist position in the war with Honduras. It was active in reformist coalitions which actually won the presidential elections of 1972 and 1977, both victories being overturned by the military. Meanwhile, by 1975 both the FPL and RN vanguards, through their respective mass organizations, had begun to surpass the PCS in influence within the working class and the peasantry.

As even the CP's traditional base within the urban trade unions was being eclipsed, the electoral fraud of February 1977 convinced the Political Commission of the PCS that the party's efforts must be redirected toward armed struggle. However, the party's capacity to move in this direction was limited. Some 87 percent of the cadre had entered the party and been trained under the reformist electoral outlook. A Military Commission was established but was divorced from all other party activity.

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Not until the party held its Seventh Congress clandestinely in April 1979 did the PCS break more decisively with its reformist strategy and turn toward joining other revolutionary organizations in the building of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN).

The Seizure of Power

Handal prefaces his critiques in "Power, the Character and Path of the Revolution and the Unity of the Left," by noting that neither the Cuban nor the Nicaraguan Revolution was led by the CP, going so far as to characterize the 1970s role of the Nicaraguan party as "disastrous." The article addresses three main issues, the first being the problem of the revolutionary quest for power. By exaggerating "the role assigned to the socio-economic program" (and a reformist program at that!), Handal says, the Latin American CPs lost sight of the seizure of state power as their key strategic objective.

In the case of Chile, for example, the official program of the Popular Unity (UP) coalition became a straitjacket: "No one had a solid orientation toward really trying to resolve the problem of state power or to defend Allende's government." The Cuban July 26th Movement, by contrast, never made its political program (or the winning of the majority of Cubans to it) the key to the triumph of the revolution. Handal extends this point to the left critics of the UP in Chile, arguing that they, too, fetishized the socio-economic program, albeit from the perspective of wanting to radicalize it. The struggle against reformism, Handal suggests, should not have centered on the UP's program per se, but rather on the problem of how and when to seek power. The decisive moment for a revolutionary assault was, in his view, the abortive June 1973 coup:

> The masses intuitively recognized the importance of that moment when the problem of power could have been resolved in a revolutionary way. They went into the streets, as we all know, demanding that the reactionary forces be struck down, the parliament closed, and the army purged; but the leadership of the process did not take up the banner.

One does not have to agree with the specifics of Handal's assessment of Chile to recognize that he has boldly broken the taboo within the Latin American CPs against publicly deliver-

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ing a critical assessment of the strange errors of the leadership of the Chilean Popular Unity.

Assessment of the Two-Phase Revolution

In the second section Handal posits an error of revolutionary theory which could help explain the abandonment of the struggle for power. The Cuban experience had given new evidence that the Latin American revolution is won in two phases, first through mobilization of the people under the banners of democracy and anti-imperialism, and then subsequently through demonstrating to the masses that the democratic and anti-imperialist objectives can only be attained and defended through the construction of socialism. But Handal argues that the CPs lost sight of "the essential and indissoluble connection" between these two phases, in practice conceiving of them as two separate revolutions:

> [W]e reacted so much and so often against the leftist idea of the struggle for direct implantation of socialism, with no prologue, that we failed to comprehend the essence of the matter and we convinced ourselves that the democratic revolution is not necessarily to be organized and promoted principally by us, but that we could limit ourselves to supporting it, and we satisfied ourselves with playing a support role, in order to assure the range and breadth of the participating democratic forces.

Thus, says Handal, the Latin American CPs (although their party documents never explicitly said so) became parties of reform, playing a subordinate supportive role to progressive middle and bourgeois sectors which the CPs hoped would actually lead the democratic, anti-imperialist stage.

In this section on the character and path of the revolution, the PCS General Secretary goes on to discuss the relationship between armed struggle and work in the electoral arena. Handal cautions those who think that the PCS played no positive role during the emergence of the armed vanguard organizations in the 1970s. While the latter were correct in taking up armed struggle, nevertheless "as the majority of these fraternal organizations now recognize," the active participation of the PCS in three presidential elections and six parliamentary and municipal elections between 1966 and 1977 "was no small contribution to the growth and development of the armed struggle."

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In effect, the participation of the PCS in the eleven-year electoral struggle . . . facilitated the intense political education of the masses of workers and people in general, winning the majority of them to the democratic, anti-imperialist cause; alerted the people and all the democratic forces in time to the dangers of fascism; and helped to precipitate the crisis of the dominant political system of military dictatorship.

Neighbors on the Left

In the final section Handal chastizes the CPs for pursuing serious political relationships only with political forces to their right, while being sectarian toward "our neighbors on the left":

We understand perfectly all the shades of different progressive forces to the right, their origins, significance, etc., but with respect to those who are on our left, we are not capable of understanding the phenomena of their existence and characteristics, their objective historic significance, nor our tasks with respect to them. We Latin American Communists have not had, for a long time, a consistent and systematic line to unite all the forces of the left, including the armed left.

This is so, he says, because "reformists can come to a better understanding with other reformists." Despite many ultra-left errors, including harsh and infantile attacks on the CPs, those to the left are fundamentally part of the vanguard because "they are obsessed with the work of organizing and promoting the armed struggle, which in Latin America and many other regions of the Third World has been shown to be the path of revolution."

Handal goes a step further to argue that, even if the CPs were not reformist, there is a material basis in Latin America's "dependent" capitalism for the emergence of distinct revolutionary organizations.

Only if the question of the new social sectors created by the expansion of dependent capitalism is understood can one comprehend the objective existence of the possibility of truly revolutionary political organizations arising outside the structures of the Communist Party, and comprehend that this is much more true of the dependent capitalist countries than the developed capitalist countries. These organizations adhere to Marxism-Leninism and base themselves on a socialist outlook, in spite of not being connected to the international Communist movement.

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Handal then quotes from a January 1979 Party document which called for a process of party-building, a struggle for unity with the other left organizations which would have the objective, sooner or later, "of the formation of a single revolutionary leadership and even the integration of parts of all the revolutionary organizations into a single Marxist-Leninist party."

As a final comment, Handal notes that this "fundamental" change in general line of the PCS is also taking place in various other CPs of Central and South America. If the implication of the 1975 Havana declaration of Latin American CPs was that revolution was not really on the near-term agenda, the Salvadoran party would now reverse that verdict. Writes Handal: "The resolution to a long crisis in our movement is now underway."

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DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF F. O. MATTHIESSEN

BY LEO MARX

> The bulk of mankind believe in two gods. They are under one dominion here in the house, as friend and parent, in social circles, in letters, in art, in love, in religion; but in mechanics, in dealing with steam and climate, in trade, in politics, they think they come under another; and that it would be a practical blunder to transfer the method and way of working of one sphere into the other. What good, honest, generous men at home, will be wolves and foxes on 'Change. What pious men in the parlor will vote for what reprobates at the polls! To a certain point, they believe themselves in the care of a Providence. But in a steamboat, in an epidemic, in war, they believe a malignant energy rules.
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson

His given names were Francis Otto, his friends called him Matty—and still do—but on the title pages of his books and to his readers generally he is F. O. Matthiessen (1902-1950). No writer in the last half century has had a greater influence on the prevailing conception of American literature and its relation to our history. He was a prolific, accomplished literary scholar and cultural historian whose masterwork, *American Renaissance* (1941), remains an indispensable text in American studies; a Harvard teacher whose principles and passion won him a devoted student following; a committed trade unionist, member

Leo Marx, author of *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America,* was an undergraduate in the History and Literature program at Harvard, 1937-41, when F. O. Matthiessen was chairperson of the Board of Tutors. After military service he returned to Harvard as a graduate student and tutor in History and Literature working under Matthiessen. At present he is Professor of American Cultural History and a member of the Program in Science, Technology and Society at MIT.

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and sometime president of the Harvard Teachers' Union; a socialist, lifelong partisan of the left and, of special pertinence here, an early benefactor of this journal. "It was owing to . . . [his] interest and generosity," wrote the editors soon after his death, "that we were able to found MONTHLY REVIEW:"[1]*

But Matthiessen's desire for an explicit affiliation with a socialist movement was frustrated. For a short time in the early 1930s he was a member of the Socialist Party, but he soon lost patience with its lack of militancy and its inability to enlist working-class support. Much as he wanted to belong to an organized socialist party, he never seriously considered joining the Communist Party because, among other things (as he repeatedly explained), he was a Christian, not a Marxist.

To aid a Marxist journal while declaring his differences with Marxism was characteristic of Matthiessen and his resolute heterodoxy. Doctrinal consistency was of little concern to him. What mattered most in politics were social justice, peace, and civil liberty, and like many left-tending intellectuals whose allegiances were formed in the era of the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War, he came to believe as a matter of principle in a united front, or coalition, of all left-wing parties. Before the defeat of the fascist powers that policy had been a manifest necessity; it was the only policy, indeed, that made sense in the presence of Hitler, Mussolini, and their potential allies within the capitalist democracies. After 1945, however, collaboration with Communists took on a very different meaning, and the fact that Matthiessen was not a Marxist did not spare him, along with many on the left, from becoming entangled in the historical trap created by Stalinism.

In the fear-ridden aftermath of the Second World War he was, more than ever, convinced of the need for a united front. The Cold War was beginning, nuclear weapons were a terrifying novelty, and the effective purge of Communists from the American labor movement looked to be the first stage in a far-reaching repression of all dissent. During the autumn of 1947, after having taught with immense satisfaction at the first session of the Salzburg Seminar, Matthiessen was a visiting professor at Charles University in Prague. At that time a Czech regime led by Eduard Benes was attempting to work out a compromise, or

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middle way, between East and West. After returning home, Matthiessen quickly wrote a book, *From the Heart of Europe,* based on the journal he had kept while abroad. There he admiringly describes the Benes regime as an exemplary effort to mediate between Soviet collectivism and capitalist democracy.

While the book was still in press, however—in February 1948—the Czech Communists seized power. Jan Masaryk, the foreign minister whom Matthiessen had met and liked, died under mysterious circumstances (he either jumped or was pushed from a window). These events came as a real blow to Matthiessen. Although he was invited to make last-minute revisions in his account of the situation in Czechoslovakia, he decided instead to add, as a long footnote, most of a letter from a Czech friend explaining—and very nearly condoning—the coup. The letter suggests that Masaryk, a man "more sensitive than rational," probably had killed himself. It also argues that most Czech workers did not care about "freedom of mind," only about "economic freedom," hence their unhesitating support of the new pro-Soviet regime. His correspondent's conclusion is that this Czech "revolution" was aimed at "limiting freedom and democracy for some, only to give it back, revived and strengthened, to all." (pp. 187-89) Although Matthiessen did not explicitly endorse this viewpoint, it is a good example of the kind of rationalization to which he, like many of us at the time, lent respectful attention.

In domestic politics Matthiessen also remained faithful to the waning ideal of a united, suprasectarian left. During the election of 1948 he was an active supporter of the Progressive Party, and at its national convention he gave one of the speeches seconding the nomination of Henry Wallace for president. The Wallace candidacy was widely attacked as another cynical Stalinist stratagem, and Matthiessen's involvement in it, along with the publication of *From the Heart of Europe,* made him a conspicuous target for red-baiting. By now the persecutory fever, soon to be known as McCarthyism, was rising. People on the right and the left accused Matthiessen of being a "fellow traveler" or "dupe" of Communists. The House Un-American Activities Committee interrogated him, *Life* magazine went after him, and Irving Howe wrote what he himself called a "very harsh and polemical" piece about him in *Partisan Review.*

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These political attacks surely contributed to Matthiessen's growing sense of isolation in the period leading up to his premature and violent death. Early in the morning of April 1, 1950, he jumped to his death from a Boston hotel window. In the last of several postscripts to his suicide note he wrote: "How much the state of the world has to do with my state of mind I do not know. But as a Christian and a socialist believing in international peace, I find myself terribly oppressed by the present tensions."[2] This widely publicized statement, along with the other political circumstances surrounding his death, helps to explain the legendary character of Matthiessen's reputation. In the press, especially outside the United States, his suicide was depicted as a political act, and he was perceived by many as having been a casualty of the Cold War.

But Matthiessen knew better. However much the oppressive political atmosphere had deepened his melancholia, he knew very well that it was not the major source. In the body of his final note, with a certainty sharply contrasting with his conjectural postscript, he emphasized his state of exhaustion and the "many severe depressions" to which he recently had been subject. By now we know a lot more about his mental condition during the winter of 1949-50 than anyone knew, or cared to discuss, at the time. By his own account his state of mind then resembled the acute, suicidal depression from which he had recovered, after a brief hospitalization, twelve years earlier. (In 1938 he also had had an impulse to jump to his death from a high place.) But a vital difference between the two episodes, as Louis Hyde suggested not long ago,[3] is that in 1938 Matthiessen's closest friend and lover, the painter Russell Cheney, was standing by, ready to help him re-enter the world. They had lived together for some twenty years before Cheney's death in 1945, and all of us who knew Matty well in his own last years were aware of his desperate loneliness. What most people could not have known much about before the publication of the Matthiessen-Cheney letters in 1978 was the nature—the closeness, depth, and centrality—of the relationship between the two.

It comes as something of a shock, if also as an encouraging index of cultural change, to realize that as recently as 1950 Matthiessen's friends considered his homosexuality unmentionable—at least in print. Nowhere in the *Collective Portrait,* in-

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cluding John Rackliffe's otherwise astute "Notes for a Character Study," is there any forthright reference to the subject. Nor does it figure in the life of Edward Cavan, the fictive Harvard professor whose suicide, more or less undisguisedly based on Matthiessen's, is the catalytic event in May Sarton's 1955 novel, *Faithful Are the Wounds*. Perhaps this is more surprising, since homosexuality was to be a prominent theme in Sarton's later novels. The distorting effect of this inhibition is discernible in just about everything that has been written about Matthiessen, but it presumably will be corrected by George Abbott White. A Boston teacher and psychotherapist who never knew Matthiessen, White already has devoted several years to gathering material for a thoroughly documented biography.[4]

The fascination that Matthiessen continues to exercise upon new generations of scholars is unusual. Most scholarly writing is quickly superseded and most scholars are quickly forgotten—perhaps never more quickly (or deservedly) than in the United States in these days of enforced academic publication. One reason that Matthiessen is an exception, of course, is that his work occupies a unique place in the development of modern American studies. When he was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford in the early 1920s, the study of literature was still dominated by Germanic philology and a bland, documentary form of literary history. But Matthiessen responded sympathetically to two fresh, seemingly antithetical approaches to literature, and in bringing them together he developed his own critical method.

One of the new approaches was the analytic formalism identified with the early work of I. A. Richards and the essays of T. S. Eliot, soon to be known as the New Criticism. To Matthiessen this meant a liberating concern with the text itself and a belief that form, or the "how" of literary practice, is as important as the content or the "what." Close attention to the power of individual texts became an essential principle of his criticism. Almost everything he wrote was directed at the understanding and evaluation of particular works; he disliked the idea of using literature as raw material for the construction of some other kind of scholarly edifice. The critic's ultimate aim should be to redirect the reader to the text with heightened understanding. In teaching and writing he found the analytic methods developed by the "new critics" immensely useful, and he was con-

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fident that they could be detached from the reactionary mandarinism that so often accompanied their application.

Besides, the other new approach embraced by Matthiessen was, in the broadest sense of the word, political; it entailed an appreciation of the indirect ways in which the greatest American writers had lent expression to distinctive aspects of national experience. From the beginning he recognized that the significant interactions between literature and society occur well below the level of a writer's express political ideas, opinions, and institutional affiliations. Politics in this sense begins with assumptions about human nature, society, and even, for that matter, literary form and practice. In *The Rediscovery of American Literature* (1967), an examination of six scholar-critics who helped to recast the way we think about our literature, Richard Ruland credits Matthiessen with having contributed the decisive, culminating work. Following Van Wyck Brooks, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, Stuart Sherman, and H. L. Mencken, Matthiessen completed the job of liberating America's cultural past from the deadly grip of WASP Victorianism.

It is hard to remember how provincial, belletristic, and unremittingly genteel the reigning conception of our literature was before the publication of *American Renaissance*. To be sure, the authority of that official canon had been undermined by the work of D. H. Lawrence, V. L. Parrington, and Yvor Winters (as well as those discussed by Richard Ruland). The fact remains, however, that Holmes, Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier still occupied prominent positions in the canon, and American literature in its entirety was condescendingly regarded by American as well as British professors of English as a minor offshoot of British high culture. Rather than attack the dominion of the Brahmins, Matthiessen simply applied the method of close reading to demonstrate the clarifying power and pleasure available to readers of his five major writers: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville. By carefully elucidating particular texts and the concepts of form behind them, he revealed for the first time just how inventive, bold, and intellectually robust the classic American writers had been. All of these writers lent expression to the egalitarian, self-assertive, wellnigh anarchic energy released by the American system, although two of them (Hawthorne and Melville) also recognized the de-

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structive form that energy could take in our ruthless economic individualism. All of them illuminated the deep conflicts, or contradictions, in the life around them. From a classical Marxist viewpoint, to be sure, Matthiessen's conception of these conflicts—the central theme, for example, of the "individual" in conflict with "society"—is too abstract, too obscurely related, if at all, to the opposition between social classes. But of course the character and extent of class conflict in the northern American states before the Civil War remains a subject of serious historical controversy. In any case, Matthiessen's emphasis upon the contradictions rather than the harmonies of meaning, value, and purpose marks an important turning point in American studies. It signaled the virtual disappearance of the older, complacent idea of our national culture as an essentially homogeneous, unified whole.

Another reason for the continuing fascination with Matthiessen is that his work embodies a rare combination of scholarly dispassion and personal engagement. It did not occur to him that his strong convictions might skew his perceptions, partly because he tended to think of the critic's job as divided into two distinct stages. In the first stage he or she is a disinterested reader, holding off judgment, open to every possible implication of the text, with the aim of seeing the work whole, including the most serious flaws in the best-liked works. Matthiessen was impatient with ideologically bound students who tried to tailor the evidence to fit a priori schemes. In the second stage, however, the critic is permitted—indeed obligated—to bring in all his or her pertinent convictions. True criticism, like all scholarship in the humanities, is finally an act of the critic's whole being. Everything that Matthiessen wrote was part of his lifelong project of discovering what he himself believed. Unlike most academic writing, therefore, his work conveys a strong sense of passionate involvement.

It is not surprising that interest in Matthiessen and his work was renewed during the resurgence of radicalism in the Vietnam era. To many young teachers and activist intellectuals he provided an example of the engaged scholar. The editors of a volume of essays on literature and radical politics (including one on the role of ideology in Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*) dedicated the book to his memory.[5] More recently, Giles Gunn

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and Frederick Stern, neither of whom knew Matthiessen, have written books about him as a critic. Both focus upon the relationships among his critical principles, his practice, and his extra-literary ideas. Gunn is chiefly concerned about the bearing of his religious ideas upon his criticism, whereas Stern is more interested in his politics.[6]

Frederick Stern's book is a sympathetic, searching examination of Matthiessen's work by a literary scholar with avowedly "radical left-wing concerns." At the outset Stern describes his excited discovery of *American Renaissance* when he was an undergraduate in the late 1940s. What impressed him was the fact that a book could be passionately devoted to a political ideal (literature for a democratic culture) yet still be a work of rigorous scholarship, "not a piece of propaganda." Later Stern wrote a doctoral dissertation, an early version of the present book, called "The Lost Cause: F. O. Matthiessen, Christian Socialist as Critic." As the title suggests, Stern interpreted Matthiessen's career as a finally unsuccessful if admirable effort to fuse his various commitments (literary, religious, political) into a logically coherent, workable whole. My impression is that Stern's earlier analysis had a sharper critical edge—a fact that presumably explains why he dropped the phrase "The Lost Cause" from the original title. What most interests Stern is Matthiessen's effort to reconcile "views of life as disparate as Christianity, socialism, and 'the tragic'." (He rightly stresses Matthiessen's belief that tragedy, as a literary kind, and the tragic view of life, are touchstones of aesthetic and intellectual profundity—of ultimate wisdom.) But Stern recognizes that Matthiessen was no system-builder, and that abstract theorizing was uncongenial to him, and he therefore touches lightly upon the alleged irreconcilability of his subject's basic commitments. In view of the "seemingly incompatible elements" in Matthiessen's thought, Stern concludes that he succeeded in developing "a remarkably unified critical structure."

But the quest for unity in Matthiessen's thought may be misleading. Even the use of "Christian Socialist" to describe him implies a greater cohesion and certitude than he ordinarily claimed for his own beliefs. "I would call myself a Christian Socialist," he wrote, "except for the stale and reactionary connotations that the term acquired through its current use by

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European parties."[7] Although he occasionally invoked the term, he also knew that to American ears it sounds bloodless, feeble, and foreign. The phrasing he more often used, "a Christian and a socialist," suggests the yoking together of separate, not easily combined, religious and political beliefs. The point is not merely that Matthiessen, like Emerson and Whitman, set little store by logical consistency. (He liked to quote Whitman's witty lines: "Do I contradict myself?/Very well then, I contradict myself,/(I am large, I contain multitudes.)") The more important point is that he recognized a positive, generative value in the embrace of opposed ideas. Unlike the conventional academic empiricists, the disengaged "experts" who unify their thought by narrowing its scope, he habitually tested his mental reach by widening the boundaries of his sympathies. This habit of mind is in my view a key to Matthiessen's creativity and to the close affinity he felt with the five writers who are the subjects of his most important book.

Their heroic effort to cope with powerful contrarieties of thought and feeling is a central if largely tacit theme of *American Renaissance*. In the opening sentence Matthiessen warns us that he is starting with the book's hardest problem: Emerson's habit, like Plato's, of stating things in opposites. In rejecting the formal or "linear" logic he associated with Lockean empiricism, Emerson opted for a compelling but risky way of thinking he called "double consciousness." Its worst feature, he confessed, is that we lead two lives which "really show very little relation to each other." One is a life of immediate, daily, practical experience, closely bound up with our physical existence, "all buzz and din"; the other is largely inward, less implicated in the present than in the past and the future, in memory and desire, "all infinitude and paradise." This divergence, as Matthiessen noted, is traceable to the familiar Kantian distinction between two modes of perception, understanding and reason, but he was less interested in the European sources of the idea than its characteristically American applications. In shifting the Kantian notion from the realm of learned metaphysical discourse to discourse about ordinary experience, Emerson had subtly changed it; what had been an idea chiefly concerned with two ways of knowing the world reappeared as an idea about two ways of living in the world.

Each of the writers Matthiessen focuses upon in *American*

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Renaissance tended, like Emerson, to construe experience as a pattern of antinomies. Even Hawthorne, who was the least sympathetic to Emersonian idealism, was obsessed by the gap between the two worlds he inhabited: the solid, beef-and-ale, mercantile world of Salem, and the disembodied, free-floating, evanescent world he created out of his ideas and imaginings. A scholar less exacting about evidence, more prone to generalization than Matthiessen, might have tried to correlate this pervasive sense of doubleness, or inner conflict, with some general theory of conflict in society. But Matthiessen characteristically held back. He had been sharply critical of earlier attempts by liberal and Marxist critics to impose a political template on literature, and he recognized the pertinence to American literature of the New Critics' emphasis upon the inner tensions—the irony, paradox, and ambiguity—embodied in literary texts. In his measured criticism of Granville Hicks, whose Marxist interpretation of American writing had elicited Matthiessen's creedal "counterstatement," he explained what he did not like about the work of most politically oriented critics. In drawing close analogies between literature and politics, he said, they invariably succeeded in blurring the essential distinctions between them. Marxist critics, like Hicks and V. F. Calverton, often invoked "fatally easy simplifications of society," and their work was marred by the crude notion that writers only can have an adequate knowledge of their age "by coming to grips with its dominant economic forces." As for a liberal critic like V. L. Parrington, Matthiessen was most put off by his dismissive attitude toward the distinctively aesthetic aspects of literature—his tendency to derogate writers like Hawthorne or James because their work was deficient in explicit political meaning.[8]

His own method of placing writers in their historical context was to recreate the network of ideas and images relating them to earlier or contemporary writers and artists working in other, often more popular, modes of thought and expression. In *American Renaissance* he ranges from folklore to ship design to political oratory to genre painting to architectural theory. One of the admirable things about the book is that Matthiessen manages to set forth this remarkably rich body of material without resorting to any general claim, or overarching thesis, about the character of the bonds between literature and the encom-

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passing collective life we call "society." But such a thesis is latent in *American Renaissance;* it is embodied in the many correspondences that each writer's version of the double consciousness[9] enabled him to establish with the conflicting forces at work—economic, racial, political, regional, ethnic, religious—in a nation veering toward Civil War. The idea of depicting reality as a clash of opposites, whatever its ultimate validity, was immensely useful to writers attempting to see through the turbulent, opaque surface of nineteenth-century American life.

Two of their most important literary inventions may be interpreted, in Matthiessen's account, as devices for coping with the debilitating sense of disunity engendered by the double consciousness. Emerson's theory of organic form, borrowed from Coleridge and put into practice by Thoreau and Whitman, was in essence a program for achieving in art the still unachieved but ostensibly emergent coherence of American life. The three American writers were, in the philosophic sense, idealists, and they tended to regard the ability of a nation's artists to transcend conflicts or divisions in thought (or art) as evidence—a kind of optimistic forecast—of the nation's ability to resolve analogous conflicts in reality. If they were the yea-sayers of the American renaissance, Hawthorne and Melville were the skeptical nay-sayers. Hawthorne's method of bipolar symbolism, later adapted to his own uses by Melville, was designed to figure forth the essentially ambiguous, illusory character of the relationship between ideas and things. *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick* call into question the transcendentalist belief in a close correspondence, an "organic" relatedness, between nature and culture. Hawthorne's letter "A," officially designated to stand for "adultery," is subverted by Hester to mean "art" or "angel." And whiteness, in the world of *Moby Dick,* may be taken to represent all things pure and virtuous or, simultaneously, the most hideous morbidity and evil. Ambiguity is inherent in the nature of things. As apprehended by the aesthetically unified but tragic vision of Hawthorne and Melville, the divided consciousness Emerson had posited is an expression of an unresolvable contradiction.

To appreciate why the double consciousness had a special resonance for Matthiessen, one has only to read the Matthiessen-Cheney letters. There we get some sense of what it was like, before the Second World War, to be a Harvard professor and

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a homosexual: the double life that he and Cheney felt compelled to live, and the many humiliating concealments and dissimulations it entailed. It is not surprising, then, that Matthiessen had a heightened sensitivity to the many variations in our literature on the theme of the disparity between appearance and reality. His own experience also made him particularly responsive to the inability of many of our most gifted writers to sustain a unified vision long enough to compose—fully compose—more than one book. (It is a striking fact that if we put aside the single masterpieces of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, or F. Scott Fitzgerald, the status of these men as "major" writers immediately comes into question.) Matthiessen was acutely aware of the insights the double consciousness allows and the precarious situation it creates—a situation that Emerson likens, in his essay on "Fate," to that of a circus rider with one foot planted on the back of one horse and the other foot planted on the back of another. To many of our artists and intellectuals, the creative life has meant just such a risk of being pulled apart by the very conflicts, conscious and unconscious, private and public, that energized their work.

* * *

It is revealing, in the light of Matthiessen's receptivity to dialectical modes of thought, to reconsider his ambivalent attitude toward Marxism. He made his final, most cogent statement of his views on that subject in his 1949 Hopwood Lecture, "The Responsibilities of the Critic." After his usual disclaimer ("I am not a Marxist myself but a Christian"), he went on to explain his belief that the principles of Marxism "can have an immense value in helping us to see and comprehend our literature."

> Marx and Engels were revolutionary in many senses of that word. They were pioneers in grasping the fact that the industrial revolution had brought about—and would continue to bring about—revolutionary changes in the whole structure of society. By cutting through political assumptions to economic realities, they revolutionized the way in which thinking men regarded the modern state. By their rigorous insistence upon the economic foundations underlying any cultural superstructure, they drove, and still drive, home the fact that unless the problems arising from the economic inequalities in our own modern industrialized society are better solved, we cannot continue to build democracy. Thus the principles of Marxism remain at the base of much of the best social and cul-

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tural thought of our century. No educated American can afford to be ignorant of them, or to be delinquent in realizing that there is much common ground between these principles and any healthily dynamic America.[10]

But he quickly followed this affirmation with a denial that Marxism contains "an adequate view of the nature of man," or that it "or any other economic theory" could provide a "substitute" for a critic's primary obligation to elucidate the interplay of form and content in specific works of art.

In 1949 Matthiessen's conception of Marxism as "an economic theory" was by no means idiosyncratic. On the contrary, it more or less accurately identified a version of Marxism in high favor during the Stalin era: a self-consciously hard, economistic, and essentially positivistic view of the world. It was positivistic in that it embraced a dichotomy between "scientific" thinking (including Marxism) and all other kinds of thinking. The scientific kind allegedly provides access, as physics does, to the underlying laws governing surface phenomena, whereas other non-scientific kinds inevitably tend to be superficial, sentimental, utopian, idealistic—in a word, unreliable. They do not yield true knowledge. From the retrospective viewpoint of the cultural historian, this Marxist-Leninist invocation of "science" belongs in part to a much wider tendency of thinkers to borrow, on behalf of any social or political theory, the impressive authority of the natural sciences as vehicles for arriving at hard, preferably quantitative, verifiable, exact knowledge.[11] This dichotomy between Marxist science and bourgeois apologetics comported with the absolutist, authoritarian political doctrines emanating from Moscow. But it would be wrong to attribute the dominion of this positivistic style of Marxism only to the power and influence of the Third International. For one thing, as Paul Sweezy reminds me, this tendency already was present in less dogmatic form in the work of such earlier followers of Marx as Kautsky and Plekhanov. For another, we should remember the incomplete state of the Marxist canon in Matthiessen's time. Even at the end of the Stalinist era such a conception of Marxism was made more plausible by the fact that several important countervailing texts, notably the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (the "Paris Manuscripts") and the *Grundrisse,* were not yet available.

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What made this mid-century version of Marxism particularly objectionable to Matthiessen was the rank, seemingly ineradicable philistinism it fostered. Many Marxists of the era were Zhdanov types who tended, as Leon Trotsky put it, to "think as revolutionaries and feel as philistines."[12] They regarded religion, philosophy, art, all ideas and activities not bearing directly on the hard material facts of life, as mere derivations from those facts, and so they consigned literature to the flimsy "superstructure" that allegedly rests on society's material (economic and technological) "base." It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this compelling architectural metaphor in disseminating the simple-minded reductionist ideas that passed for a Marxist theory of culture in that period. Even as originally invoked by Marx, the metaphor had been unfortunate—it is static and it lends itself to the mechanistic idea of a one-way, from the bottom up, interaction between the "real foundation" of society, the economic base, and the entire political, legal, and ideological superstructure. In recent years the metaphor has been the subject of extended discussion by Marxist theorists,[13] and the complicated question of its validity cannot be settled here. What remains clear, however, is that during the 1930s doctrinaire Marxists often removed the metaphor from its theoretical context and applied it so literally that it could be said to validate the undialectical notion of a direct economic determination of all ideas and, indeed, of all human behavior.

What might have given pause to Marxist critics of literature is the close resemblance between this philistine attitude and the characteristic utilitarian attitudes of bourgeois Victorians. Thus, Thomas Gradgrind, Dicken's archetypal nineteenth-century business philosopher, was a vehement exponent of a mechanistic base-and-superstructure model of reality. This was the aspect of "Marxism" that Matthiessen found most repugnant. In trying to explain himself to his Marxist friends and associates, he often recurred to their evident inability to take religious experience, even the religious experience of the past, seriously. "If any of you really believe that religion is only 'the opiate of the people,' " he said at the dinner given in his honor when *American Renaissance* was published in 1941, "you cannot hope to understand the five figures I have tried to write about in *American Renaissance*."[14]

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In retrospect Matthiessen's rejection of what he took to be Marxism is doubly ironic. For one thing, some of today's practicing Marxist critics, Raymond Williams for example, would consider Matthiessen's literary theory (either as exemplified by his practice or as expressly set forth in the Hopwood Lecture) to be more acceptable—closer to their own theories—than the rigid economistic version of Marxism that Matthiessen found repugnant. This is not the place to review the remarkable development of Marxist thought since 1950, but its correlative literary theory has become a much more supple mode of analysis, far more responsive to the formal, aesthetic dimension of literature, than it was in Matthiessen's time. That is partly a result of the fact that Marxists have recovered and in some measure reinstated the work of the young (Hegelian) Marx that had been dismissed by the 1930s commissars of culture as hopelessly utopian and idealistic.[15] To recover the work of the young Marx, incidentally, is not necessarily to belittle the importance of the passage Marx had effected during the 1840s from an Hegelian to an historical materialist viewpoint. But the overall tendency of Marxist thought during the last twenty years has been to allow much greater historical efficacy to ideas and non-material culture than was allowed by the mainstream Marxism of the Stalin era. It is this development which now makes Matthiessen's thought seem less distant from Marxism than he himself believed it to be.

The striking fact is, moreover, that the ideas of the young Marx had emerged from the same body of thought that Matthiessen wrote about with so much sympathy in *American Renaissance*. In Hegel and in post-Kantian idealism generally, Marx and the American writers who were his contemporaries—especially Emerson—shared a common philosophic legacy. In Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question," written in 1843, roughly a year after Emerson's initial published formulation of the "double consciousness," the young Marx had set forth a similar distinction. Adopting terms used by Feuerbach, he distinguished between a person's awareness as an individual, activated by the self-serving imperatives of material life in a capitalist society, and a person's awareness of being a member of the human species—or "species-consciousness." In Western culture the sense of partaking in "species-life," formerly embodied in Christianity,

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had been displaced to the political state. The result of this divided consciousness, for Marx as for Emerson, is that people find themselves leading two almost completely unrelated lives.

> The perfected political state is, by its nature, the *species-life* of man as *opposed* to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life continue to exist in *civil society outside* the political sphere, as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality,* in *life,* a double existence—celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the *political community,* where he regards himself as a *communal being,* and in *civil society,* where he acts simply as a *private individual,* treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.[16]

Although Matthiessen's own work exhibits some aspects of this post-Kantian legacy (one writer has referred to his "profound grasp of humanist dialectics"[17]), he did not recognize the significance of the close affinity between the ideas of the young Marx and those of Emerson. This is surprising because Matthiessen had been a publicly avowed socialist for some ten years before the appearance of *American Renaissance,* and during that time he often had deplored the absence of a working-class socialist movement in the United States. Under the circumstances, he might have been expected to seize upon the initial conjunction and subsequent divergence of proto-Marxism and American literary thought (exemplified above all by Emerson) as a way of illuminating the vexed issue of "American exceptionalism." (Among the advanced capitalist countries of the world the United States is "exceptional" in the failure of its intelligentsia to take Marxism seriously, in the failure of socialism to gain a mass following, and in the absence of a working-class socialist party.) Unfortunately Matthiessen ignored the entire subject. This lacuna, along with his conspicuous inattention to Marx and Marxist thought in a book notable for its wide-ranging allusiveness and its highly individualized perspective, is in large measure attributable, I believe, to Matthiessen's overreaction to the shallow, mechanistic Marxism that prevailed during the 1930s.[18] Yet the lack of explicit attention to Marxism in *American Renaissance* is somewhat misleading. In his subtle treatment of the interplay between literature and society, Mat-

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thiessen in a sense anticipated the development of a more supple Marxist cultural and literary theory since its liberation from the rigid doctrinal cast of the Stalin era.

The second irony in Matthiessen's rejection of what he took to be Marxism is that he nevertheless allowed that doctrine to skew his own political thinking.[19] Some of the very formulas he repudiated within the context of literary theory informed his response to the political "line" emanating from the Soviet Union. This is not to suggest that he condoned the Stalinist repression, but rather that his opposition to it was softened by the received justification for that authoritarian regime. Like many other non-Marxists, Matthiessen was impressed by the anti-fascist policies of the USSR during the early 1930s, and his thinking about the long-term prospects in Russia followed the standard first-things-first logic inherent in the base-and-superstructure model of social reality. (Notice, incidentally, the uncritical way in which he invoked that treacherous metaphor in the passage from the Hopwood Lecture cited above.) He assumed that the aim of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was to build the indispensable economic base for socialism, and that during the period of primitive socialist accumulation a degree of authoritarianism was a more or less unavoidable necessity. The fact that Russia had not had a bourgeois revolution, and that it was a peasant society without democratic institutions, gave added credence to this viewpoint. At bottom the cogency of the argument rests on a fundamental assumption of historical materialism—one that Matthiessen, for all his protestations about not being a Marxist, was intermittently prepared to accept: the ultimate, long-term, or "in the final analysis" primacy of a society's economic structure. Hence the need for the non-Communist left to reserve judgment or, in effect, to tolerate a hiatus between the building of the economic base and the raising of a truly socialist (hence truly democratic) superstructure.

This widely accepted latitudinarian argument was behind Matthiessen's adherence, even after 1945, to the "united front" strategy. He had long since abandoned the liberal reformism typical of American academics; he thought of himself as a radical, and did not require instruction on the systemic character of our society's problems. Then, too, he was acutely aware of the reactionary use to which anti-Communism was being put in the

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early years of the Cold War. "One of the most insistent clichés of the right and even of the liberal press," he wrote shortly before his death, "is that there can be no cooperation on any level between Communists and non-Communists."[20] But of course the insoluble problem was to define the extent of that cooperation. At the local level it involved the elusive issue of "Leninist" tactical duplicity, and on the global level it involved the question of limits (in duration and severity) to the allegedly temporary "dictatorship of the proletariat." But in the rush of events there was no time for Matthiessen (or anyone else) to clarify, much less resolve, these questions. Commenting on the support that Matthiessen and other non-Communists gave to Henry Wallace's presidential candidacy in 1948, Professor Stern simply notes that they were "mistaken about the possibilities and realities of Soviet life after World War II." They were listening, he says, to "their own wishes rather than to evidence and reason."[21] He might have added that Matthiessen, trapped between Stalinism and reformism, was accepting a kind of casuistry that he had identified and pointedly rejected in the interpretation of literature.

But it is doubtful, finally, whether Matthiessen's objections to Marxism would have been satisfied by the work of today's revisionists. To be sure, he would have been far more sympathetic with the "humanist" Marxism of Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse, or the literary methods of Williams, than he was with the orthodoxy of his time. In his arguments against that doctrine, indeed, Matthiessen anticipated many of the current arguments *within* Marxism—especially those leveled by E. P. Thompson against the ideas of Louis Althusser.[22] Matthiessen charged Marxists generally, as Thompson does Althusser, with constructing their theories at too great a distance from the hard evidence—the concrete particularities—of political life. And like Thompson, Matthiessen felt that mainstream Marxism, with its bias toward economic reductionism, tends to neglect that half of culture which derives from the affective and moral consciousness. For Matthiessen, as for Thompson, a crucial shortcoming of the work of twentieth-century Marxists has been their neglect of the imaginative and utopian faculties of humanity. Unlike Thompson, however, Matthiessen did not believe that those faculties could be adequately accommodated within any form of historical materialism.

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Hence Matthiessen's continuing adherence to his unfashionable, demanding, explicitly political version of Christianity. He took the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself as "an imperative to social action." Indeed, it was "as a Christian," he said, that he found his "strongest propulsion to being a socialist." He acknowledged that this distinguished his religious views from those of "most orthodox Christians of today." It also distinguished his conception of human nature from the one he imputed to Marxism: a simplistic, psychologically shallow notion of human perfectibility; by asserting its rational, economic interests, the working class might be relied upon to achieve liberation for—eventually—all humankind. In contrast to this sanguine view, and under the influence of Freudian psychology and Niebuhrian theology, Matthiessen endorsed the doctrine of original sin—the idea that human beings inescapably are "fallible and limited, no matter what . . . [the] social system."[23] At this point his belief in the tragic character of human experience impinged upon, and in a sense joined, his commitment to Christianity and to revolutionary socialism. The essence of tragedy, in his view, is the ultimate inseparability of the human capacity for destructiveness, or evil, and the capacity for nurturance, or good. In effect Matthiessen was disavowing the millennial strain that runs through Marxism and indeed the entire left tradition of political thought. This optimistic tendency of mind underestimates the psychological or, more broadly, behavioral constraints upon social amelioration. "Evil is not merely external," he wrote in distinguishing his views from both the shallow Marxism and the complacent Christianity of his time, "but external evils are many, and some societies are far more productive of them than others."

Today the political import of Matthiessen's religious belief, with its attendant critique of Marxism, is more obvious and more telling than it was during his life. At that time, when only one nation professed a commitment to revolutionary Marxism, the shortcomings of Soviet society were relatively easy to explain away. But the coming to power of revolutionary socialist movements around the world has made it more difficult to ignore the discrepancy between political realities and the millennial expectations of Marxism. Today many of the arguments within Marxism turn upon fundamental issues raised by F. O. Matthiessen forty years ago.

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NOTES

1. Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, eds., *F. O. Matthiessen: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), p. vii. This book originally appeared as a special issue of MR in October 1950. A list of the books about Matthiessen mentioned in this review appears on p. 55.
2. The complete text of the note appears in *A Collective Portrait,* pp. 91-2.
3. *Rat & the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney,* Louis Hyde, ed., Introduction (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978), pp. 3-4.
4. White expresses his interest in the problem in his review of *Rat & the Devil:* " 'Have I Any Right in a Community That Would So Utterly Disapprove of Me If It Knew the Facts?' " in *Harvard Magazine* (September-October, 1978), pp. 58-62. Harry Levin also discusses the problem of Matthiessen's homosexuality in a trenchant review of *Rat & the Devil,* "The Private Life of F. O. Matthiessen," *New York Review of Books* (July 20, 1978), pp. 42-46.
5. George Abbott White and Charles Newman, eds., *Literature in Revolution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972). White's contribution is "Ideology and Literature: *American Renaissance* and F. O. Matthiessen," pp. 430-500.
6. Giles B. Gunn, *F. O. Matthiessen: The Critical Achievement* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1975); Frederick C. Stern, *F.O. Matthiessen: Christian Socialist as Critic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981).
7. *From the Heart of Europe,* p. 72.
8. *"The Great Tradition:* A Counterstatement," a review of Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition,* in *The Responsibilities of the Critic, Essays and Reviews by F. O. Matthiessen,* John Rackliffe, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 198. Matthiessen's scathing review of V. F. Calverton's earlier effort to interpret American literature from a Marxist vantage, *The Liberation of American Literature,* is reprinted in the same collection (pp. 184-189). For Matthiessen's reservations about Parrington, see the Preface to *American Renaissance.*
9. An obvious problem, too complex to be resolved here, is whether the "double consciousness" refers to one state of mind or several states. Among the distinctions with which it is associated in *American Renaissance* are (1) Kant's "understanding" versus "reason"; (2) Emerson's "natural facts" versus "symbols"; (3) Thoreau's acting versus self-observing selves; (4) Whitman's "soul" versus "other I am"; (5) Hawthorne's daylight recording of material reality versus his moonlit vision of an imagined world; and (6) Melville's upper air of benign appearances versus an undersea realm of murderous realities.
10. *The Responsibilities of the Critic,* p. 11.
11. But this is not to suggest that all assertions of the "scientific" character of Marxism are tainted by vulgar "scientism." To resolve this complex problem it would be necessary, in each case, to consider the particular sense of "science" being invoked.
12. Quoted by Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 1.
13. Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 71-72; G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A*

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Defense (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 217-248; Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* pp. 3-16; Paul M. Sweezy, *Four Lectures on Marxism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981) pp. 20-25; E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), pp. 157-62; Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 82, November/December, 1973, and *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 75-82. If a consensus can be said to be emerging from this discussion, it is the need to preserve the indispensable premise of the Marxist theory of history, namely, the primacy of the forces of production as ultimate determinants of the limits within which any society and culture can develop and, at the same time, the need to rid the theory of the static, unidirectional implications of the base and superstructure model.

14. *A Collective Portrait,* p. 142. Here Joseph H. Summers is quoting Matthiessen's impromptu remarks from memory.
15. A particularly compelling testimonial to the intimidating effect of such an anti-utopian bias, or what he calls "the scientific/utopian antinomy," is E. P. Thompson's reconsideration of his own 1955 study of William Morris. In a "Postscript: 1976" to the reissue of the book, Thompson vividly describes how his earlier treatment of Morris had been skewed by his adherence to what he later came to reject as an excessively rigid, mechanical materialism. At issue, he believes, is the place of "moral self-consciousness" and "a vocabulary of desire" within Marxism, and its tendency to fall back, in lieu of these, upon the old utilitarian ideal of "the maximization of economic growth" (p. 792). See *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 763-816. For other formulations of a less rigid Marxist literary theory, see Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), and *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).
16. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 26-52. The quotation is from pp. 34-35. Emerson's concept of the double consciousness, cited by Matthiessen in *American Renaissance,* p. 3, is from his essay, "The Transcendentalist" (1842).
17. Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art: Essays Classical and Contemporary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 275; quoted in Stern, *F. O. Matthiessen,* p. 223.
18. "Over-reaction" because Matthiessen, with his aversion to theory in general, and his failure to devote himself to extra-literary problems with anything like the seriousness he devoted to literature, simply ignored the available work of Marxist or quasi-Marxist theoreticians from which he might well have profited. Among them were T. W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Kenneth Burke, Lucien Goldmann, Antonio Gramsci, George Lukacs, and Hans Meyer. (The fact that all but Burke were Europeans also suggests the distorting effect of Matthiessen's preoccupation with American thought.) Stern discusses the reasons for Matthiessen's failure to come to grips with Marxist cultural theory in *F. O. Matthiessen,* pp. 221-231.

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19. On this subject I am relying on first-hand experience as much as on Matthiessen's published writings. Between 1945 and 1950 I spent a great deal of time with Matty in my capacity as a graduate student, a fellow tutor in the History and Literature department at Harvard, and as a friend. We had many long conversations on these issues. For corroboration I have relied on Jane Marx, my wife, who participated in many of those conversations, especially during the summer months we spent with Matty in Kittery, Maine. I also have had the benefit of criticism of this essay by former friends of Matthiessen's: Richard Schlatter, Paul Sweezy, J. C. Levenson, and G. R. Stange.
20. "Needed: Organic Connection of Theory and Practice," *Monthly Review* (May 1950), p. 11. This was one of two posthumously published fragments bearing on the problems of the left. The other, "Marxism and Literature," was a brief that Matthiessen had prepared for the defense in the trial of the leaders of the Communist Party (U.S.A.) under the Smith Act. *Monthly Review* (March 1953), pp. 398-400.
21. *F. O. Matthiessen*, p. 27.
22. Thompson's attack on Althusser is contained in "The Poverty of Theory—or an Orrery of Errors," *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); for a useful interpretation of the argument, see Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism, op. cit.*
23. His clearest statement of his creed appears in the autobiographical section of *From the Heart of Europe*, pp. 71-91, reprinted in *A Collective Portrait*, pp. 3-20.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES ABOUT F. O. MATTHIESSEN REFERRED TO IN THIS ESSAY

Giles B. Gunn, *F. O. Matthiessen: The Critical Achievement* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1975).

Louis Hyde, ed., *Rat & the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978).

Harry Levin, "The Private Life of F. O. Matthiessen," *New York Review of Books*, July 20, 1978, pp. 42-46.

Richard Ruland, *The Rediscovery of American Literature: Premises of Critical Taste, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

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May Sarton, *Faithful Are the Wounds* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1955).

Frederick C. Stern, *F. O. Matthiessen: Christian Socialist as Critic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, eds., *F. O. Matthiessen (1902-1950): A Collective Portrait* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950).

George Abbott White, "Ideology and Literature: *American Renaissance* and F. O. Matthiessen," in *Literature in Revolution,* George Abbott White and Charles Newman, eds. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).
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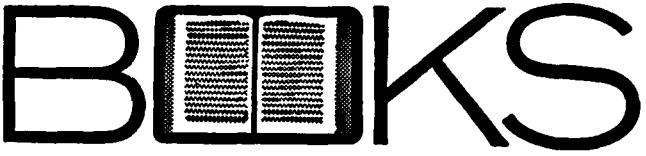

CORPORATE POWER AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

By Roger Bybee

Big Steel: Black Politics and Corporate Power in Gary, Indiana, by Edward Greer. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978. 287 pp., $16.50; paperback, $6.50.

When Gary, Indiana, voters elected their first black mayor, Richard Hatcher, in 1968 it seemed more like a revolution than a mere election to both his supporters and opponents.

He won by mobilizing the city's black majority against the opposition of both the city's entrenched white-run political machine and the city's small and dependent black establishment. Hatcher's program—which called for increasing employment, an end to the underassessment of U.S. Steel, tough new anti-pollution laws, fundamental improvement in the decayed housing stock of Gary, and reform of the notoriously corrupt and brutal police department—promised to bring sweeping changes to this sooty industrial city of 180,000 people.

But more than a decade later, as former Hatcher aide Edward Greer shows in *Big Steel: Black Politics and Corporate Power in Gary, Indiana,* Hatcher was able to bring about even modest changes only in the area of police reform.

Roger Bybee is the editor of *The Racine Labor,* a weekly paper with a circulation of over 15,000 in the Racine, Wisconsin, area. Since its founding in 1941 by Loren Norman, a dissident coalminer, *The Racine Labor* has had socialist editors and socialist politics.

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Within the police department, after much struggle, Hatcher was able to increase the responsiveness of the department and bring about a reduction in corruption and brutality primarily through the hiring of black police officers who tend to feel more a part of their communities than do white officers.

But in the other areas where he sought change, Hatcher's efforts have largely ended in frustration.

Why has it been so difficult to transform Gary into a city that meets the needs of its working class and poor citizens? This is a key question not only for Gary but for every other frostbelt (and older sunbelt) city which is watching its industrial base flee, leaving behind a shrunken tax base and a population forced to substitute low-paying service jobs and public assistance for lost high-wage industrial jobs.

Greer is careful to avoid the simple answer. He explains that when he came to Gary, he believed in a fairly simplistic model of power, and he felt that U.S. Steel's overarching presence in Gary "exemplified the political control held by monopoly capital." But he says that a decade of immersion in and reflection upon the politics of Gary have left him with a more complex understanding of power in the city. His new understanding is reflected in this summary: "This close alignment of the petty bourgeoisie with monopoly capital in control of the government and civil society, together with the virtual absence of any autonomous working-class activity, explains contemporary American political life."

The city of Gary was born in 1906 as a company town to house the workers and managers of the U.S. Steel Corporation's new Gary works, at that time the biggest steel mill in the world. Named after U.S. Steel Chairman Elbert Gary, the town has been shaped since its founding by the giant steel company, although its representatives have usually opted to stay in the background.

The corporation's leaders set out to avoid the mistakes of previous efforts at creating company towns. They were well aware of the failure of George Pullman's effort in nearby Pullman, Illinois, where railway-car workers rebelled against arbitrary management in both the plant and in the company-owned town. U.S. Steel officials opted instead for more indirect forms of control.

As one executive put it, the most successful company-initiated towns were those which were "farthest removed from the suspicion of domination or control by the employer." To which Greer adds: "The corporation wanted the political life of the community to be dominated by the respectable middle-class elements on which it could confidently rely. In this, it was to prove largely successful."

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This meant that the corporation sometimes lost out on key issues. For example, small business interests won an early struggle over the location of a trolley car line, which meant that the company was not able to use the route to enhance land values for property it owned. But over the years, both U.S. Steel and small business groups in Gary have been content to maintain the alliance.

The compromise allowed small businessmen to run the city and practice corrupt machine-style politics of the worst sort. Positions on the police force were commonly purchased. The building inspection department, until Hatcher came to office, literally did little more than collect bribes.

The machine offered little in the way of tangible long-term benefits for the working people of Gary, but it did provide plenty of Christmas baskets and election-day payments. While the U.S. Steel/small-business/middle-class alliance ruled Gary, the conditions at the bottom of society gradually decayed. Beginning in the 1960s, the central business district of Gary began to collapse; as suburbanization pulled out the more successful businesses, leaving behind weaker enterprises which were hard put to stave off failure in the face of rising crime and a lack of capital. The housing stock deteriorated as years of neglect resulted only in the denial of mortgage money necessary to revive the city's neighborhoods. In effect, virtually an entire city was red-lined.

Many of Gary's problems were rooted in the decline of the steel industry, which meant fewer good-paying jobs shoring up the city's economic foundations. In 1950 when the industry was still prospering, per capita income in Gary was 118 percent of the national average; by 1972 it had skidded to 98 percent of the national figure.

Hatcher attempted to compensate for the drop in private-sector employment at U.S. Steel by creating government jobs with federal grant monies. But his strategy was doomed to have a limited impact on the high jobless rate among Gary's black population. As Greer explains, referring to the drop in jobs at the U.S. Steel Gary works since the end of the Korean War, "what this means . . . is that while the private economy is in disarray, advances in government employment for blacks will not solve urban poverty or the economically depressed conditions of black people. Whatever advances Mayor Hatcher was able to implement in terms of affirmative action in the hiring of minority group members by the city were overbalanced by the failure of the steel mill to grow."

The lack of growth in U.S. Steel's Gary works has reflected the company's investment policies, which have concentrated com-

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pany funds on projects which offer a quick return, instead of refurbishing U.S. Steel's notoriously outdated equipment and physical plant. In 1978, for example, U.S. Steel put only 28 percent of its investment budget into steel, with the lion's share going into the company's chemical division, Disney World, condominiums, real estate, and a chain of shopping malls.

U.S. Steel's strategy, with its emphasis on short-term profits at the expense of the workers and communities dependent on steel, became even more apparent in December 1981, with the company's $6.3 billion bid to buy Marathon Oil. Unwilling to make the long-term commitment to update its decaying and decrepit mills (average age: 17 years compared to 12 years for its U.S. competitors' mills), the company has made clear its preference to reap the easy profits gushing from Marathon's oilfields.

This essentially parasitic pattern of investment, shaped by the rate of profit without regard to social needs or human costs, has had a disastrous impact on the Garys of America.

The company's unilateral control over its investment decisions (a defining characteristic of capitalist enterprise) has allowed it to continue to dominate the city even under Hatcher's reform-minded administration. Hatcher and his staff know that if they push U.S. Steel too hard on taxes or pollution control they will be faced with the very real threat of the company's cutting back or shutting down its Gary operation, which would deliver the knock-out punch to an already staggering city. On the issue of taxes, for example, Greer and other aides were able to document that the company was annually evading some $30 million in local property taxes, imposing a severe burden on working-class residents, whose rates are about 50 percent higher than the statewide average. But when the company resisted efforts to force higher payments, Hatcher backed off. Says Greer: "Undergirding this . . . is the vast economic power of U.S. Steel. Even without overt conflicts of interest, government officials are frightened by corporate threats of relocation."

Hatcher was able to pull back because there was no large-scale pressure from below to press ahead. As Greer states, U.S. Steel's success in combating reform efforts

> rests to a large extent on the absence of any effective popular power in the community capable of engaging in serious contestation. No independently organized working class or black groups existed which were able to launch the necessary effort, and the fundamental interests of the majority of the people of Gary in this matter did not even reach the political arena.

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Greer's book thus makes for somewhat discouraging reading. The alliance between U.S. Steel and small business allows the company to remain in the background, while the small-fry capitalists push for their interests. If things threaten to get out of hand, and somehow U.S. Steel is confronted with fundamental challenge, it merely needs to start dropping hints about moving to a more hospitable "business climate," and the challengers usually retreat.

Greer's fine book thus reminds us that corporations do not need direct control over government for their interests to dominate. As long as they retain control over the investment process, they are in a position to meet each reform thrust with the highly potent threat to pull the plug on local communities and workers. This is an important contribution to socialist literature on urban power and, indirectly, on the often rarified debate on the nature of capitalist domination of the state. Its starting point in the analysis of power in one city makes it much more concrete than the vast majority of the literature on the nature of power in capitalist society.

That is not to say that Greer succeeds on every score. For example, he describes his work as an attempt to explain "how popular consent is achieved." But he tries to explicate capitalist hegemony solely in terms of the strong alliance between U.S. Steel and the petty-bourgeoisie of Gary, without delving into the structural and cultural factors which seem to me to be at the core of working people's uneasy acceptance of capitalism.

Second, in analyzing the selection process which resulted in the choice of the site which was to become Gary, Greer notes only the largely technical factors which were discussed publicly by U.S. Steel executives. He does not explore the possible political considerations in the choice of an isolated type of company town. This is an odd omission, as Greer notes the political implications of some of the design features of Gary (e.g., no public space or square which would be likely to encourage political activity by working people), but unfortunately fails to place the location decision itself in the context of corporate industrial location strategy.

According to David Gordon, a socialist urbanologist, it was around the time of Gary's founding that corporate leaders were becoming increasingly concerned that the dense packing of large industrial cities like Chicago was creating hothouses of working-class militancy in neighborhoods located adjacent to large industrial plants. Strikes tended to spread from one factory to the next, as strikers would march from one plant to another, drawing out

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their fellow workers. The years of explosive industrial militancy, in the Chicago area in particular, began to encourage a decentralization of industry away from urban concentrations of working-class strength. This desire to flee organized workers, a precursor of the widespread industrial flight from unions to the sunbelt which has shaped our national political economy, may or may not have been an important factor in the specific choice of the Gary site. Unfortunately Greer does not explore this vital question.

Finally, Greer's emphasis on the weakness of popular working-class organizations in Gary bears closer inspection. It is true, as he implies, that corporate interests have largely dominated urban centers like Gary except under exceptional circumstances. But Greer paints such a one-sided picture of corporate power that one is left with no sense of how popular organizations like unions and community groups can constrain, much less transcend, the power held by corporations.

Moreover, in the period covered by Greer in his book, there were "new populist" organizations operating in Gary around such issues as pollution and taxation, and there was the ferment that gave rise to Ed Sadlowski's reform movement in the United Steel Workers. Yet none of these developments is referred to except in passing, if at all.

Nonetheless, Greer's book makes major contributions to our understanding of capitalist power at the local level. As a labor activist in another midwestern city, I deeply value Greer's account of power in Gary, Indiana.

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND LEFTISTS

By Ted Snyder

I was surprised to find "The Vatican as a Left Ally?" emblazoned on your July-August 1982 cover. Although I am no expert on the upper reaches of Catholic Church policy-making, I have spent a number of years working to fulfill the many promising tenets of Catholic social teaching. It was good to see an article or two in a left journal which attempted to take the Church seriously as a vehicle of social change. Too often we are either disregarded or ripped off by left groups in search of a constituency. Congratulations to Carl Marzani for looking past his upbringing as a Roman (none more cynical—with reason—about the Church than they) and wading into a very complex topic. That said, may I offer some cautions and observations:

(1) While what the Vatican and bishops do or say is important, what is actually going on at the parish level is the real test as to whether the Church is shifting. There is a long history of progressive Catholic social teaching being ignored by pastors and people. In my work I find that the average parishioner has never heard of *Laborem Exercens,* for example. The movement of the bishops of the United States into application of the principle of the absolute sanctity of human life to the arms race is known to Catholics, but with mixed reviews. Many have bought the bankrupt liberal axiom that religion and public policy do not mix. Whether the bishops will be able to unite on a common statement on nuclear arms or not will be one hurdle. The biggest hurdle will be whether or not they can teach more effectively on that problem

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to the Church than they were able to do with, say, *Humanae Vitae* on artificial contraception. The Reagan administration may be able to divide people off from the bishops on the question of support for a nuclear arsenal.

(2) Journalism in general fails to look at the dynamism which in fact does characterize an increasing amount of the Church at the local level. (If this seems to contradict the above statement, that's okay.) The national Campaign for Human Development has been the secret hero of community organizing and community-based economic development. A hundred million dollars has been raised from Catholics and granted to projects owned and operated by the powerless in this country who challenge their political and economic domination. This has happened over the last 10 to 12 years as the country slid into the "Me-Decade" and worse. Unprecedented numbers of parishes have institutionally become part of community coalitions, some of which have been very successful. The press has either ignored these developments or downplayed them.

(3) Theologians are just beginning to probe economics. North American theologians are way behind on this, but starting to develop a North American perspective on the religious and moral imperatives attendant to a consumer-oriented imperialist economy. In the meantime the American Enterprise Institute and other neo-conservative organizations are buying their own Catholic theologians to launch a pre-emptive strike against any North American version of liberation theology. Given the involvement of upper-income Catholics in management of Big Business, they may be successful in blunting the influence of progressive theologians in the Church of this country.

(4) The unclarified status of women in the Catholic Church threatens the future vitality of the Church in the United States and Western Europe.

(5) A continuing pluralistic dialogue between the left and a variety of elements in the Catholic Church is needed. I have never understood why the left is so gun-shy of accepting serious differences with the Church, while coalescing around issues of common concern. In spite of past bad experiences with socialism and communism, I see more openness to working together in the present on the part of many Church people than on the part of left people.

Good luck. I hope MONTHLY REVIEW invites and attracts more such articles.

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(*Continued from inside front cover*)

welcomed. The following remarks by Paul Sweezy, speaking as co-editor of MONTHLY REVIEW, may be of interest to MONTHLY REVIEW readers, especially younger ones unfamiliar with the earlier history of the MONTHLY REVIEW enterprise:

"Congratulations to Harry and Bd on their golden anniversary. I'm sure they're going to be around for many more, and I hope to be around to share with them.

"We have been associated together on MONTHLY REVIEW since 1969, almost a third of the time of their association with each other. Actually, of course, both relationships are even longer. Harry and Bd grew up together, and their role in MR antedates the formal joining of forces after Leo Huberman's death in 1968.

"The transition from an informal to a formal relationship could not have been smoother or more natural. From the very beginning in 1949, Leo and I relied heavily on the counsel and support of sympathetic advisers whose knowledge, experience, and judgment we deeply respected. In the early days two of the most important of these collaborators were Max Werner, who will be remembered by some of the older among you, and Michal Kalecki, the Polish social scientist who is rightly regarded as one of the greats of this century. After they departed—Max Werner through a tragically premature death and Kalecki to return to his native land—their place was taken by Paul Baran and Harry Magdoff. If my memory is not at fault, we met Harry through Paul. After Paul Baran's death in 1964, also tragically premature, we relied more and more on Harry. And as Leo's health declined, we invited Harry to join us as co-editor any time he might want to. When Leo died in 1968, the transition took place as though foreordained.

"But there was another sense in which the transition was natural and smooth. From the beginning, Leo's wife Gertie had been a key part of MR. After 1968 Bd became an equally essential cog in the machine. Without the two of them, MR would certainly not be what it is today.

"I don't recall exactly when Harry formally became co-editor of MR, but it must have been just about this time at the beginning of 1969. We can therefore rightly celebrate today as both a fiftieth and a fourteenth anniversary for Harry and Bd.

"In closing I want to pay my tribute to Harry not only as a co-worker, in which respect he could not be improved upon, but as an intellectual of formidable stature. He is a respecter of theory but always skeptical of its claims. He has a deep and abiding sense of history and insists on the highest standards of empirical research. He is courageous and critical in the widest and best sense. He fulfills better than anyone else I know the admonition Marx as a young man expressed in a letter to a friend: 'Since it is not for us to create a plan for the future that will hold for all time, all the more surely what we contemporaries have to do is the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results nor the conflict with the powers that be.' "

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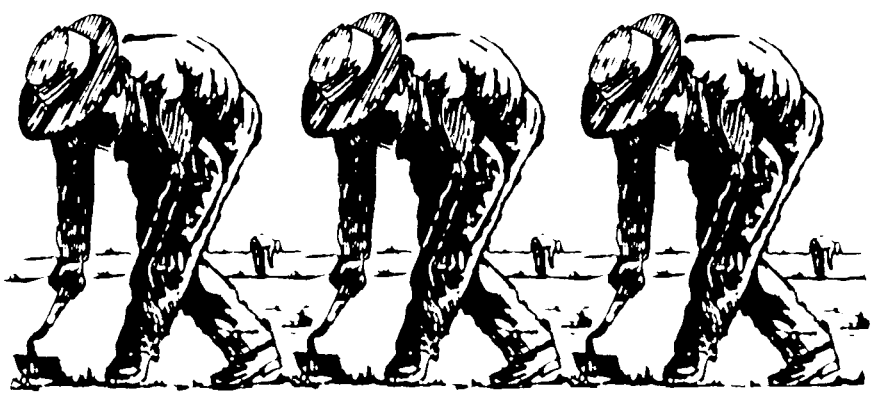

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